

This is Not an Act of Spite

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Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warnings:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings , Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	Gen
Fandom:	DreamSMP
Relationships:	Wilbur Soot & Technoblade & TommyInnit & Phil Watson , Toby Smith Tubbo & TommyInnit , Ranboo & TommyInnit & Toby Smith Tubbo , Grayson Purpled & TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Technoblade & TommyInnit
Characters:	TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Wilbur Soot , Toby Smith Tubbo , Technoblade (Video Blogging RPF) , Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF) , Kristin Rosales Watson , Ranboo (Video Blogging RPF) , Floof the Dog (Video Blogging RPF) , Grayson Purpled (Video Blogging RPF) , Niki Nihachu , Sam Awesamdude , Aimee Aimsey (Video Blogging RPF) , Cassie Anne Snifferish
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Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of Acts of Spite
Collections:	sipping cocoa and listening to mitski , SBI Fics for the soul , thinksmoon's collection of best sbi fics , loonar's best of MCYT/DSMP , Multi-Fandom Fic Collection , Dsmf fics , It WAS meant to be fuckers , Elvie's favourites , The fanfics that had me lying awake at night like omg , *slaps fic* this baby can hold so much trauma , It's 3am and I am sobbing , These are for my friend lol , Vigilante Pog!! , International Fanworks Day 2022 -

[Classic Fic Recs](#), [Best Dream SMP Fanfics](#), [Dolls Favorites](#), [Favorite fics <3](#), [Read these emma!!](#), [Rat loves angst](#), [Rebel's favorite fics!\(smp\)](#), [I'm a sucker for Found family and SBI is full of it!](#), [luciana's fics she would genuinely die for](#), [Blobfish's favorite fics](#), [Wani's sbi hyperfixation of \(mostly\) super hero fics](#), [ohh what's that? *trips and falls down the hole*](#), [Kit's Favourite MCYT Fics](#), [DizzyRose Vigilante/Villain fic](#), [TommyInnit fics that hurt my feelings](#), [SBI Superpower fics bc I have issues](#), [moth's fanfic recommendations](#), [Just another SBI Super AU... doesn't change the fact that I'll devour it.](#), [rexmint's fave dsmp fics!](#), [fics i would eat](#), [◇*。 fics so perfect that they change the definition of perfection \(๑'۰`๑\) ◇*。 bee's fics for ariel](#), [Angst. Just pure agony.](#), [when insomnia hits](#), [Yes, to read or not to read that is the question](#), [DSB\(DreamSmpBooks\)](#), [Things I still need to read on this web](#), [Dsmp OG](#), [Mcyt fics](#), [Literally the embodiment of 'chefs kiss'](#), [some of the best angsty fics ive read](#), [thunder's library of legendary fics](#), [My heart flutters](#), [my most favourite fics](#), [☆*: .o. o\(≧▽≦\)o .o.:*☆](#), [Ky's TBR](#), [oh no my minecraft era has returned](#), [i will and can trade my soul for these fics](#), [actually id rather keep my soul](#), [Esperando a que terminen-](#), [wh- what do you mean I'm crying?](#) (i also love them so much like <3) (mcyt), [Fics That Inspired Me to Become A Better Person](#), [my fav fics ever - mostly sbi that are tommy centric](#), [a collection of every dsmp fic i've read](#), [cauldronrings favs \(◡ ౧ ◡\)◇](#), [DSMP](#), [shark's read later collection](#), [Books I started but didnt finish yet <33](#)

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This is Not an Act of Spite

by [ellis \(ellabellachicketychella\)](#).

Summary

Could the universe be kind enough, so that Tommy could get a damn break from the mess that is his life?

Please? Just for one day.

Okay, so maybe coming to the interview with a few broken ribs was a bad idea, but what choice did he have? Just not come and keep on being unemployed?

Several bad things could happen during his interview, given the circumstances. There was an AI in the building designed by Vulcan which not only kept unwanted people from getting in, it scanned people for any unauthorized weapons or injuries. There was also the problem with his illegal documents since he wasn't an actual adult. But the biggest risk is that the job is at a hero organization.

And he's a vigilante. Which are highly illegal.

or, yet another vigilante tommy au... except this time, there is at least one brain cell (you can figure out who has it)

Notes

STOP REUPLOADING MY WORK ONTO WATTPAD, YOU DON'T NEED AN ACCOUNT TO READ IT HERE

Also hi guys! Welcome to TINAAOS, it's a long boy so buckle in. Also has a lot of dark themes, there are warnings on the start of most of the chapters, especially later on. Hope you enjoy! Take care of yourself!

Note from the future: this fic features cc's who personally i want nothing to do with, i wrote all of them in before finding out the extent of things they had done/said that do not align with anything i believe in and they are people I do not want to be associated, however, since the fic is two and a half years old and 500k words i do not have the means to go back and edit things the way i would like it at the moment.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

- Translation into Español available: [Esto no es un acto de despecho](#) by [ScapeSystem](#)
- Inspired by [Restricted Work] by [hedgehoggeryy](#).

In Which Nothing Goes Wrong For Tommyinnit

Okay, so maybe coming to the interview with a few broken ribs was a bad idea, but what choice did he have? Just not come and keep on being unemployed?

Several bad things could happen during his interview, given the circumstances. There was an AI in the building designed by Vulcan which not only kept unwanted people from getting in, it scanned people for any unauthorized weapons or injuries. There was also the problem with his illegal documents since he wasn't an actual adult. But the biggest risk is that the job is at a hero organization.

And he's a vigilante. Which are highly illegal.

And as he stands in front of the huge building he starts to question if he should really do this. The answer was obvious to him.

Yesn't.

So, he straightens his posture and walks in, trying extremely hard not to wince at the pain in his chest. He smiles at the receptionist at the front desk when she looks up at him, almost praying that the AI doesn't scan him.

"Hello, I'm here for the interview for the position of assistant?" he didn't mean to make it sound like a question, he wanted to sound sure of what he was saying but his nerves were getting the best of him.

The lady (named Kristin, according to her name-tag) smiles back at him and his nerves turn from crashing waves in a storm to soft raindrops and he feels warm. She looks inside a drawer and pulls out a keycard from it "Please put this around your neck or make it visible at all times for Henry to be able to scan," he assumed Henry was the AI "this will give you access to the floors you need to go to and will expire after the day ends, if you get the job you'll receive a new badge to access most floors in the building."

Kristin goes on as Tommy puts the badge around his neck "You'll go through that door-" she points to the door a few feet to her left "-turn right and there will be an elevator," she turns back to him "the waiting room for the interview is on the 46th floor, just walk down the corridor and there will be a room with people waiting, when your name is called you'll head up to the 50th floor and head into the room labeled "Interview Room", you'll have your interview there."

Tommy nods at her, processing the information given to him as his smile widens "Thank you." he walks to the door Kristin had pointed to after receiving a good luck from her.

Walking through the corridor are multiple people, some in suits, some in lab coats, he tries his best not to crash into any of them as he maneuvers his way through, eventually reaching the elevator- which is surprisingly empty- he goes into it and presses the button to the 46th floor.

He moves his hand up to his chest as a particularly sharp pain hits him, he almost screams when he hears a male voice speak up "You seem to have two broken ribs and a bruised stomach, these injuries cause immense pain and should be treated at a hospital, shall I notify L'manberg's hospital to come and get you?"

So that was Henry, at least it didn't scan him at the front desk. "Oh no, it's okay, I'll get medical help once I'm out of the building." he winces at the way his voice trembles.

"Understood, still, I must inform a higher-up of your injuries as of protocol."

When he tried yelling at the AI to please, for the love of Prime, not tell anyone, Henry didn't respond, leaving him in a suspenseful silence as he seriously considered quitting right now as to not screw up his possibilities of getting the job any more than they already were.

So there's not much he can do but wait when he reaches his floor, and as he enters the waiting room he realizes he might've misjudged just how many people were trying out for the position. The room was like the waiting rooms in a hospital, rows of chairs that in total could hold at least 40 people, but right now there were people standing because all the seats were taken.

He nervously stands by the entrance of the room, as far away from other people and unwanted conversations as he could be. Even so, there wasn't much conversation happening, most people were looking over papers anxiously, muttering to themselves while the other minority of people were just looking as confident as ever, glaring at each other like they each had committed a horrendous crime.

People were dressed in fancy suits, surely to make a good impression and he can feel the looks as they analyze his simple hoodie and jeans. In his defense, he seriously had more important things to spend money on than a stupid fancy outfit.

He almost falls asleep where he's standing and his legs are seriously started to cramp from how long he had been there waiting, it had to have been at least two hours, he should've expected it from the sixty-something people that had been waiting when he entered the room. He was sure the only reason he didn't fall asleep was because of the constant pain in his chest with each breath he took.

He jumps when he hears his fake name being called by Henry, resulting in some stares by the people still in the room. He moves swiftly out of the room, not being able to stand being there any longer than he has to.

Once he gets into the elevator he hesitates before pressing the button to the 50th floor, he shifts his weight from one foot to the other as the elevator goes up, getting closer and closer to his destination and he also just gets closer to being sent into a panic attack, but he keeps his attention on anything he can see and hear to ground himself and power through this.

He moves almost automatically when the doors open and before he notices he's in front of the room set for his interview. He stares at it, examining the door as if it were the most interesting thing to ever exist, he wrings his hands, breathing starting to get a little harder and chest throbbing as he takes deeper breaths.

"You seem to be experiencing high levels of distress, would you like me to contact someone to assist you?"

He snaps back to reality when Henry's voice speaks up, he takes a few small breaths to calm himself down, "No, it's okay, I'm okay, there's no need to call anyone over." he states tremblingly, looking up to the ceiling as if there's where Henry would be.

"If you say so sir, if you need assistance, just call my name."

Tommy hums in response, knocking on the door in front of him without thinking twice about it. When he gets the confirmation to come in he takes one last deep breath that sends pain through his torso and enters the room, with a new air of confidence to him, as if he wasn't about to have a panic attack at the door just moments before.

That confidence crumbles and he almost drops to the floor crying when he sees who's sitting at the desk inside the room, ready to interview him.

Number 4 hero, Spectre, also known as Wilbur Soot, is sitting there, looking over some papers that he assumes belong to his file.

He almost weeps when the hero looks straight at him "Thomas Underscore, right? Please, take a seat."

When his legs start working again he marches over and takes a seat opposite of the hero "You may know me as Spectre but I'd prefer if you could call me by my name, Wilbur." the hero, Wilbur, gives him a strained smile, probably tired from the many people he has interviewed so far.

Tommy gives the man a nod, his own strained smile making an appearance, his fiddling hands making his anxiety known.

"Okay, first things first, I need to know if you are ready to deal with any dangers that may come with this job." the hero's eyes seem to be searching for... something "I understand if you say no, it's a bit of a deal-breaker amongst many."

It dawns on Tommy after a moment.

He's challenging him.

And by Prime, Tommy is not someone who backs down when challenged.

"I'm fine with the dangers of this job, after all," he gives a cheeky grin to the hero
"Danger *is* my middle name."

Wilbur looks down at his file before stifling a laugh, clearing his throat to try and hide it "I see, well, follow-up question, how do you deal with situations of great stress?"

Tommy refrains from tilting his head "Well, I suppose it depends on the situation, if you're talking about deadlines and such that's not much of a problem, if it's crime-related like, let's say, a kidnapping, I'm sure there would be a way of contacting you, and if not, I've had self-defense classes." he pauses, looking the hero in the eye "I can hold my own in a fight."

The hero in front of him seems to be processing the information given to him and Tommy realizes he may have talked too much.

Well.

Fuck.

Tubbo had told him at least half a dozen times to *keep his answers short, do not talk too much*. Well, there goes that plan.

"Why do you want to work here?" Wilbur finally asks.

"When I was young, I wanted to be a hero, when I, later on, didn't develop any abilities I gave up, but I guess the closest thing to that would be working with heroes."

Wilbur seems to perk up to that "You have no abilities?" he looks back down at Tommy's file, reading it over.

"No, but I believe that shouldn't affect my work in any way." Tommy tries to swallow the knot in his throat. Had lying about his abilities been the right move?

Wilbur smiles at him, the first genuine smile he had seen from the man "I believe so too."

"Okay," Wilbur closes the file on his desk "anything else you want to say, or are we done here?"

Tommy almost stumbles over the words that want to spill out of his mouth. That's it? Three questions and that's that? Had he fucked up that badly? "I- Oh no, that's it, thank you for your time-"

"Actually sir, Thomas seems to have two broken ribs and a bruised stomach."

Silence.

"Fucking snitch."

He is so not getting this job.

In Which TommyInnit Just Wants To Go Home

Chapter Notes

I'm glad you guys liked the last chapter so here's a new one :D

Updates will not be consistent, it really depends on how I'm feeling, but I'll try to update at least once or twice a month

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Wilbur stares at him with muted terror, mouth opening and closing as he thinks of what to say.

There is *no way* Tommy is getting this job.

They stare at each other, the silence in the room is deafening and Tommy feels like throwing up.

And then Wilbur is standing up and rushing to his side, looking so pale he could've been mistaken by a ghost.

"Why are you here if you have two broken ribs?" Wilbur stresses, frantically looking over him, hands risen up but hesitant to touch him as if scared to cause any more damage.

"Well- I just- I couldn't just reschedule an interview like that." Tommy forces out.

Wilbur snaps his mouth shut, looking at Tommy in disbelief before speaking up again "Henry, please cancel the rest of my interviews for the day or ask someone to cover for me, doesn't matter. You," he addresses Tommy "are coming with me."

Tommy can't even protest as he stands up, the hero holding onto his arm and leading him out of the room.

"Henry, please tell Techno to meet me in the med bay." who the hell is Techno.

"The Hospital Floor, sir?"

"Yes, the fu- yes the hospital floor!" the man almost yells out, stressed, yet still careful as to not grab onto Tommy too forcefully "Sorry!"

Tommy looks at Wilbur quizzically. Had this man just apologized to the AI? He's getting more and more confused by the second.

The only way to describe the atmosphere when they're both in the elevator is awkward.

They just stand there. Silent.

That is until Tommy just can't keep quiet anymore.

"So..." starting off strong, huh "Do you have object permanence?"

Wilbur looks at him "What?"

"Do you have object permanence?" he tries again.

Wilbur keeps staring at him, dude, was this man deaf or mute?

"Object permanence?" ah, he speaks!

"Yeah, y'know when you play peekaboo with babies and they don't know where you go? They think you're not there anymore so they don't have object permanence." he pauses, fuck it, he's not getting this job anyways "Are you a baby, Wilbur?"

"Thomas, of course I have object permanence," Wilbur answers slowly as if Tommy would find it difficult to understand.

"First of all, call me Tommy. Second of all," he scoffs, turning his head so that he's looking at the elevator doors and not Wilbur "I'm sorry but if you close the door to my room and you're outside, you simply just do not exist anymore."

"Tommy, I still exist when you can't see me." he says, like an idiot.

"No ❤️"

Wilbur stares at him, terrified "How the fuck did you say tha-"

"Listen, when I can't see you, you simply do not exist, you're simply a figment of my imagination." before Wilbur can even try and debate with Tommy anymore, Tommy's speaking up again "This elevator ride is taking an awfully long time."

"Well, now that you mention it, you're right." Wilbur looks up to see on which floor they're at and that's when he realizes,

He hadn't clicked on a floor yet.

Tommy and Wilbur look at each other, silent. And then they proceed to laugh to the point of tears.

It was stupid, they were stupid. Bunch of idiots.

Well, it was funny until Tommy started wheezing in pain, out of breath, he clutches his chest at the pain that spreads through it.

The laughter immediately stops and Wilbur rushes to press the button to the correct floor, holding onto Tommy and supporting him so he doesn't fall to the floor.

As they go up to the med bay the only thing Tommy can think about is:

"This day just can't get any worse."

When the elevator doors open he is met by a pink-haired man standing there with crossed arms, who he immediately recognizes as The Blade.

Well, seems that he spoke too soon.

The Blade's eyes immediately meet his own, before moving to look at Wilbur, "Why do you have a child with you." that didn't really sound like a question.

Tommy furrows his eyebrows "I'm nineteen, you stupid cunt." and Wilbur's laughing again.

The Blade doesn't look impressed in the slightest, he keeps looking at Wilbur, waiting for him to stop laughing so he could explain the situation.

"He-" Wilbur coughs, trying to keep his laughter under control "He has two broken ribs and a bruised stomach."

"And you're laughing?" he raises an eyebrow before looking at Tommy "C'mon kid, sit on the bed so we can treat ya." he gestures to one of the many medical beds in the room.

Tommy refrains from answering that he is, in fact, not a kid, and just does as he's told, hissing at the sharp pain on his torso.

"Honestly, Wilbur, treating broken ribs and a bruised stomach is easy, you could've done it yourself, instead of, you know," he looks straight at Wilbur "calling me and interrupting my work."

"By work, you mean watching SpongeBob or videos of guinea pigs, Techno?"

The Blade, or Techno apparently, scoffs as if embarrassed "By work, I mean work, that is confidential and that we should not talk about in front of a child." he states as he takes an ice pack from a mini-fridge by the bed.

"Blade, I'm gonna punt you into the fucking sun if you call me a child again."

Wilbur stifles a laugh, coughing into his hand to hide it as Techno narrows his eyes in Tommy's direction.

"Here, take this." he hands Tommy a glass of water and a pill, Tommy hesitates before swallowing it down with the water "Okay, now take your hoodie off and sit up with your back straight, I need to check how bad the fracture is before deciding how to treat it."

Tommy scrunches his face in distaste, extremely hesitant to do it before deciding fuck it, they already know about the injuries and taking his hoodie and t-shirt off and sitting up straighter.

He hisses in pain when Techno presses down on his chest, touching around the dark bruises "When and how did this happen?"

"Uh, well, it happened maybe two days ago? I was mugged when going grocery shopping, I guess I didn't think it was broken." Please believe me, please believe me, please, for the love of Prime, believe me.

Techno hums in acknowledgment "It's broken alright, the fracture seems to have been caused by a blunt weapon. Tell me, have you been having any extreme shortness of breath, dizziness or confusion, been coughing up blood, feeling weak in general?"

"Shortness of breath, yes, a bit, the rest, no."

"Good, you don't need surgery, from what I felt it seems to be an incomplete fracture, it's not broken all the way through." he picks up an ice pack, holding it out to Tommy "Put this on your chest, it'll relieve the pain, take acetaminophen or ibuprofen, any painkiller really if the pain is too strong and do not, and I mean *do not* wrap your chest with bandages." he waits for Tommy to nod before finishing "As for the bruised stomach, just put ice on it for 10 minutes, wait 20 minutes before putting it back. You can also use a heating pad, it'll help too."

Tommy swallows, trying to push his embarrassment down, as Techno puts the medication away and Wilbur stares at him.

"Alright, Wil, I need to talk to you, kid," Tommy glares at him "just stay here, keep the ice on your chest." Techno pulls Wilbur aside by the elevator doors.

Tommy can only catch the words "hire", "Phil" and "Tommy" before giving up on eavesdropping and instead choosing to look around the room. It was spacious, a bunch of medical beds with curtains in between, there were also other rooms, he was pretty sure the whole floor was dedicated to treating the heroes' injuries *"If they get as injured during patrol as I do then they probably need it"*.

The tech in this room would probably be something Tubbo would die to see, even if their whole purpose was to treat injuries. Tommy grimaces at the thought of Tubbo, he and Ranboo had been worried enough about him trying out for the SBI's assistant as it was, when they find out all of this mess happened he'll be as good as dead.

He barely notices the heroes coming back until they're right in front of him, Wilbur looking a tad bit more worried than he was before and Techno looking like he didn't like the fate that had been sealed for him.

"Alright, we're gonna keep you here for just a few more minutes and then you'll be free to go on your way, that is, unless you have any other injuries?" Techno tilts his head at him, which is strangely terrifying.

Tommy feels confused for a second "Wouldn't Henry notify you of all my injuries?"

"Henry only tells us the most severe injuries, the ones we should prioritize, the ones that can be dealt with less urgency are left on the back burner," Wilbur explains this time, speaking to him for the first time since he started getting treated.

"I don't think I have any other injuries, nothing else hurts." Tommy finally answers the question.

"Henry?"

"No other injuries of importance, he has bruises on his legs and back but these seem to be almost completely healed." Henry informs helpfully, not.

"More injuries?" Wilbur quietly asks as Techno takes a look at his back.

"Muggings happen often in Logstechire, only been caught by them a couple times."

Wilbur looks at Techno like he had just seen a kicked puppy before looking back at Tommy to address him "You live in Logstechire?"

"Yeah, I live with my two roommates." he answers with uncertainty, not sure whether or not that was the right answer "One of them is studying technology and robotics."

"Alright, well I think you're stable enough to go home now." Techno states, taking the ice from Tommy to put away.

"Are you okay to go home alone or would you like me to drop you off?" Wilbur asks worriedly, looking over him as he puts his hoodie back on "I think I should drop you off."

"No, no, it's okay, I'm fine with going alone," he gives them a grimacing smile "there's no need for you to drop me off."

"If you say so.."

Tommy nods, standing up from where he was sitting and holding back a wince at his still hurting chest. He waves goodbye at the two heroes as he speedwalks towards the elevator.

Once he's inside and the doors close he drops to the floor slowly, breathing in and out slowly with wide eyes.

So we can all agree that Tommy is not getting this job, right?

Chapter End Notes

Please do leave a comment, it gives me so much motivation to continue the story :)

In Which TommyInnit Meets Some Kinnies

Chapter Notes

Thanks to the co-creator of this fic, [ellabellachicketychella](#) for writing the fight scene :)

"They took care of your broken ribs?!"

"Well, it's not like I fucking told them!"

Tubbo is currently pacing from side to side, hands on his ears as if that'd stop any of Tommy's nonsense from passing through. Ranboo is just sitting on the couch watching the scene unfold, his expression anxious.

Tubbo stops in an abrupt manner, turning to look at Tommy so fast that Tommy winces when he hears a crack "Then who, pray tell, the fuck told them?"

Tommy raises his arms in indignation "The AI is a fucking snitch! It's not my fault!"

"Maybe if you hadn't been so cocky while on patrol and fucking destroyed the earpiece, y'know, the one that keeps you *alive*, you wouldn't have two broken ribs!"

Tommy sits down beside Ranboo, pouting "I'm a big man, I don't need your fucking earpiece!"

"You're a fucking idiot is what you are!"

They glare at each other in silence, almost as if they were having their own nonverbal conversation.

"So, uh, what do you guys want for dinner?" Ranboo asks quietly and awkwardly from his place on the couch.

"A punch in Tommy's stupid fucking jaw." Tubbo scowls.

"Fuck you, we're having burgers."

"Fuck you, sausage rolls."

"We're having burgers." Tommy crosses his arms.

"We are NOT."

"We are! You clingy bastard."

"I want sausage rolls!"

"I want burgers!"

"And I want you to stop taking out your earpiece!" Tubbo's glare hardens, he bends down picking up a stray sock off of the ground and throwing it at Tommy.

Tommy brings his arms up to use as a shield "And I want you to stop underestimating me!"

"WELL MAYBE IF THE BURGERS DIDN'T THINK THEY WERE A BURDEN, THEN WE COULD HAVE THEM FOR DINNER!" Tubbo finally yells out.

Tommy stands back up "MAYBE IF THE SAUSAGE ROLLS WEREN'T OVERPROTECTIVE, CLINGY BASTARDS THAT UNDERESTIMATED ME, WE'D HAVE THEM IN THE FRIDGE!"

"Dude, I'll just make spaghetti," Ranboo mutters to himself, standing up tiredly and walking to the kitchen, leaving his two roommates to keep arguing in whatever metaphors they were using.

During dinner both teens glare at each other, Ranboo pointedly ignoring them and talking about the frog he saw while coming back from work.

And when they're done another argument has started up.

"You are not going on patrol," Tubbo says with crossed arms, looking like a disappointed mother.

"Fuck you, I'm going on patrol," Tommy answers, already halfway out of the window, clad in his suit.

Well, maybe calling it a suit was too generous. It was just a black and red hoodie with some loose pants, the only things covering his face were a black face mask and goggles Tubbo had made, his head was covered by his hood most of the time, he often held it up with his magic so it wouldn't fall.

"You have two broken fucking ribs, Tommy Kraken Danger Underscore Beloved Innit."

"Your point being?"

"Tommy!"

"See ya!" Tommy half yells and promptly jumps out of the window.

He boosts himself up onto the top of another building with his magic, adrenaline coursing through his body at the thought of falling from this height.

He perches himself on top of the building eyes scanning the area around him. It was a quiet night so it'd probably be a slow night as well, after all, who commits crimes on a Tuesday?

Tubbo hadn't informed him of any activity yet through his com (which he had put on for his own safety (against Tubbo)) so he assumed that for now, he was free to do as he pleases, so he jumps from building to building, simply appreciating the way his magic felt.

He almost misses a jump when he sees Quackity, a hero, standing there looking at him. He stumbles forward when he lands on the building, stopping himself with his magic before he can crash into the hero.

They stand looking at each other in silence, that seems to be happening a lot lately.

"How's it goin' man?" the hero smiles at him, posture relaxed.

Tommy straightens his stance slightly, suspicious, he stays quiet.

"You don't talk much, do you?"

Tommy shakes his head no, bringing his hands up to sign *"I don't talk."*

Quackity stares at him a confused look on his face "I- I don't understand sign language."

So, in a moment of bravery and because his instincts told him to, he flips the hero off, which, as result, makes Quackity almost fall over laughing.

The hero points at him, hiccups from laughter interrupting him as he tries to speak "Now *that*, I do understand!" the hero laughs, clutching his stomach as he doubles over.

Tommy stares at him, hand over his mouth to contain his own giggles, the hero's laughter being infectious, his posture relaxes slightly, highly doubting the hero could arrest him in this state.

After the hero calms down, he simply sits down on the floor, patting the spot beside him as an invite. Tommy, still not completely trusting him, sits down in front of him, a good distance between them.

"I'm not here to arrest you if that's what you're worried about." Quackity props his head on his head in apparent boredom "I don't really care what you're up to as long as you don't commit some major crime, but I got curious about you after I saw you on YouTube."

He was on YouTube? He didn't think anyone had filmed him while on patrol, how many people knew about him now?

"Sooooo, I wanted to know what your name is, but I guess that'll be harder than I thought huh?" then he mutters to himself "Should've brought a pen and paper just in case."

Tommy tilts his head, unable to show his exact emotions with his face covered, he doesn't even have a name, he didn't think that far ahead when he decided to become a vigilante since it was such a sudden decision, he didn't really deem it necessary. Until now that is.

He shrugs at the hero, trying to convey his thoughts into words. But the hero only stares at him, confused.

Tommy makes an exaggerated movement of rolling his eyes, shrugging again.

"You.. don't know?" the hero asks, seemingly more confused than he already was.

Tommy shrugs once again when he hears his earpiece beep, then Tubbo's voice is filtering through. Tommy holds up a finger to shut the hero up before he's even talking.

"There seems to be reports of a robbery on the bank, two blocks down north, from what Ranboo saw there were five people, all in... hero masks."

Tommy looks in the direction Tubbo had directed him to, he quickly gives the hero a two-finger salute before boosting himself off the building and towards the bank.

"Any more information?" he mutters to the com.

"One guy's power seems to be fire breathing so be sure to look out for that, everyone else's has guns so I'm assuming they don't have powers, don't let your guard down though."

He does an epic landing in front of the bank because of course he does and looks at the men trying to currently break into the high security protected bank. He leans back on a dumpster behind him, uncaring of how dirty it could possibly be, he watches the men struggle to get through the security for a few seconds, amused.

He bangs his fist on the side of the dumpster three times with force, almost letting out a loud laugh when all of the guys turn to look at him simultaneously, the stupid hero masks with exaggerated features staring into his soul.

He salutes them, leaning lazily on the dumpster, he yawns, crossing his arms and just looking at the men. He wants to make a sarcastic remark so bad.

One of the men, who has a Dream mask, drops his gun, and then there's a car being thrown at him. Tommy startles, telekinesis huh? Well, he has his own tricks as well.

The car is then covered by a red aura as it stops mid-air, the man who threw the car at him makes a sound of surprise, frozen as he watches the car be thrown down the street.

Tommy winces when he hears it crash, he feels bad for the poor person whose car just got destroyed. He hopes whoever the car belongs to has insurance.

He's busy looking at the tipped-over car when he hears fast-paced footsteps coming in his direction, and when he looks back he barely has time to duck from a punch being thrown at him.

He punches the guy in the face, registering that he has a Blade mask before springing right back into action.

He really hopes the tipped over car has insurance—

Another thing is thrown at him, it clatters against the wall and he dives out of the way. Landing on top of the dumpster, he looks over at everyone looking up at him. With the- just god awful masks.

Like... he's seen some bad masks, but these are up there. They're the sorta cheap stuff that people found at the dollar store.

A metal trash-can lid flies at him, and Tommy throws out his hand. It stops in the air, floating for there a moment, before flinging it at the person who threw it at him. (A Dream mask, the eyes were in the wrong spot.)

It clatters against the person, and the Dream-kinnie falls to the ground.

Tommy flicks his wrist and the Dream-kinnie floats in the air for a moment, surrounded by red for a split second.

Twisting his other hand, he opens the dumpster lid to his left and just... puts the Dream-kinnie in the dumpster.

Someone cries out, for their friend apparently, and all Tommy could do was sigh. He flips off of the dumpster (shut up, no he didn't fall flat on his face.)

Heat erupts in front of him and Tommy stumbled back, feeling the tips of his gloves singeing at it.

Ah. A Sapnap-kinnie. Shocker. Firebreather and all.

There's the Blade-kinnie, Dream-kinnie (in the dumpster), Sapnap-kinnie, the Spectre-kinnie (it's literally just Spectre's face on a mask, it's funny.) And the Outwit-kinnie.

Two powered, three not.

Cool.

He could do this.

Wait, the Dream-kinnie has telekinesis-

The dumpster lid slams open, and someone lands on Tommy's back. Forcing him to hit the ground, and he does hit the ground with a thump.

Okay. Ow.

He really hopes this car has insurance.

He groans under the feet under his back- his poor ribs.

Slowly he raises a hand, trying to focus on the car that had been thrown down the street.

His magic grips it, he can feel it.

He really, really, hopes this poor car has insurance.

The car flies, into the small part of the alley, and with the momentary confusion, he rolls out from under the Dream-kinnies leg and mostly out of spite, twists it in a way that has the kinnie on the floor.

Tommy stands up, looking around for the next thing.

The Sapnap-kinnie was trapped under the car. And the other three were trying to help them out, which was very cute honestly-

Too bad.

Tommy flicks his wrist again, all of the masked-kinnies being surrounded by his magic.

Flicking his wrist again, they're all slamming against the wall.

Tommy walks up to them, zip ties their wrists together. He zip ties them together, then zip ties the group to the dumpster.

He sighs, looking at the Sapnap-kinnie who is still trying to burn him by breathing fire all aggressively.

Rude.

Then, as the mature adult he is.

Stands on top of the dumpster, and grabs a permanent marker from his pocket (it's useful, okay?)

Kinnies try to rob a bank. More at 7:

Pledse arrest them.

:)

He jumps off the dumpster with a flip (mostly to show off, if he's being quite frank) and flips off the kinnies now in a ball of arms, legs and trying to attempt to get away.

They wouldn't get away.

As long as the telekinesis guy didn't look at any of the-

He slumps with a sigh, Tommy walks over and grabs a scarf from next to the dumpster. Before tying it around the Dream-kinnies eyes, making him unable to use his powers. He protests, but it won't do shit.

There.

Now they wouldn't get away.

And he runs down the street.

Another successful crime dealt with.

Once he can hear sirens coming near the bank, he slumps against the wall of an alleyway, putting his hand on his chest and groaning at the pain. So much for getting better.

He ends up helping people do minor stuff for the rest of the night. Feeding some stray cats with food an old lady leaves out for him to do so; Helping out the guy load his moving truck because he didn't have time to do it during the day; etc.

When he gets home through the window and tiredly takes off his mask and goggles he barely has time to set foot on the floor before Ranboo and Tubbo are screaming at his face. He almost gets whiplash from the difference between the silence outside and his roommates yelling.

Eventually, the screaming dies down and they just stand there, standing while staring at him.

He looks at them tiredly "...What?"

"You received an email from the SBI!"

Tommy stands there, processing the information, almost like an old computer, before he's once again full of energy and running over to Tubbo's computer.

The email hadn't been open yet and he already feared the worst, he takes small breaths before opening the email, already expecting it to start with "We regret to inform you that..." and yadda yadda.

So when that's not what he's met with,

His brain kind of shuts down.

He turns slowly, very slowly, to his roommates.

"What, the *fuck*?" he asks calmly.

He got the job?

How *the fuck* did he get the job?

What?

In Which His New Job Is... Interesting

Chapter Notes

TW. *guns, violence, threats*

(just be careful, it's not dark or anything. Just be careful!)

Thank Ellis for the long af chapter, don't expect every chapter to be like this because holy shit -AAuthor

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He had promised himself that as soon as he saw Wilbur Soot he would just, punt him.

Just, punt him, straight into fucking Pluto or some shit.

He just did not deserve to have a panic attack over being accepted into the position of assistant. The interview didn't even go well for Prime's sake!

So why the actual *fuck* did SBI employ him?

When he enters the building he almost doesn't say hi to Kristin in his confusion, only really paying attention to her when she handed him his keycard. Right after that he quickly waves goodbye to her and goes straight to the elevator.

Henry takes him to the SBI floor without even needing to be told to. He taps his foot on the floor, counting the seconds as he goes up to the... 69th floor? Really? If you're laughing, haha, real mature. What comedy gold guys, c'mon, laugh it up.

Once the elevator doors open, he barely has time to walk into the room before Henry's voice is loudly sounding out.

"Ay, look at this fucking loser, his ribs are worse!"

"Oh, what the fuck!"

Loud laughter erupts from what he sees is a couch, he sees Spectre, or *Wilbur*, doubled over laughing, Techno sitting there, looking at him over the back of the couch.

Tommy glares and if he gets fired for what he's about to do then so be, fucking, it.

"Wilbur, prepare yourself, for I am about to punt you." he's a decent man, he warns people before punting them. God, he's so poggers.

"Woah, woah, woah, what?" he laughs, straightening his posture and looking at Tommy with a confused yet amused smile on his face. He looks fucking stupid.

"I. Am. Going. To punt you."

"I'll pay you fifty bucks if you do!" Techno calls out, the twitch on his lips giving away his amusement.

Wilbur turns quickly to look at his brother "Techno!"

"You better keep that promise, big man!" and then.

He kicks Wilbur in the shin, because he's not about to kick a guy in the balls.

When Wilbur falls to the floor in pain, Techno stands up laughing, stumbling a bit towards him and wincing. Wilbur immediately looks up at Techno, eyes searching, Techno waves a hand at him dismissively, now walking without a limp towards Tommy. He seems to take out a fifty dollar note out of thin air (Tommy looks him up and down confusedly, he didn't have pockets) and handing it to Tommy.

Tommy looks at him strangely "You okay there big man?"

Techno shrugs turning to sit back down on the couch "Just got a bit roughed up during training, patrol didn't help much."

Tommy looks down at Wilbur, who's back at holding his shin in pain and muttering curses. Were those tears?

Then, the biggest man walks in through the elevator, maybe he could even be considered God himself. The only man ever.

Philza Minecraft.

"Which one of you shits reprogramed Henry."

Techno points at Wilbur, looking over some book he had picked up. Phil looks down at Wilbur, a disappointed look on his face.

Wilbur flips off Techno, knowing he was being accused without even having to look up. He slowly stands back up muttering something about Techno and legs before looking down at Philza. How dare he look down upon Philza when he deserves to be looked up at.

"Techno did, you know I got blocked from the system, Sam doesn't let me mess with Henry anymore." he crosses his arms, obviously disliking his inability to use the AI for his own benefit and amusement.

Phil nods, his own arms crossed, wings tight against his back as he finally looks over at Tommy. And Tommy just,

Well, Tommy freezes.

I mean, who wouldn't? It's Philza fucking Minecraft, are you kidding me?

And then Philza does this noise that sounds like a bird chirping, smiling at him, "Hey, you're Thomas, right? Pleasure meeting you, mate."

Tommy could die, he could die and he'd be happy.

Through the turmoil in his mind, Tommy is able to answer with a small "Pleasure."

"May I gently remind you that Thomas's ribs are worse than they were last time he was here?"

Wilbur's face morphs into one of panic, immediately moving closer to Tommy, babbling about the med bay or something like that.

"Pain killers are in the kitchen. Second drawer next to the fridge, the ones you're looking for are at the back." Techno comments offhandedly. In result, Wilbur pulls Tommy to sit at the kitchen counter while he looks for the medicine.

Either Techno has no care for his own safety during patrol and training or he's had to deal with Wilbur's injuries one to many times. Either way, it's concerning.

Philza follows them, calmly going over to the drawer Wilbur was looking through and pulling the pain killers out. Wilbur snatched them from his hands, taking out a water bottle

from the fridge and giving it all to Tommy, panic still very much evident in his features.

Tommy quietly takes the pain killers, mostly for Wilbur's sake, his ribs didn't hurt that much.

"Bruised chest?" Philza asks, and of course he's going to answer, this is the only man ever.

"Uh, broken actually."

Philza blinks at him "Broken. Broken ribs."

"Well, here we go." Techno states.

"Why did you come to work?!" Phil stresses, looking him over just like Wilbur had done.

"Uh..." Tommy looks up at them, "Honestly? I was going to punt Wilbur."

For a long moment the silence settles around them.

Before Techno burst out laughing across the room. "You are my new favourite person," he doubles over clutching his stomach.

"You were gonna... what mate?"

"Punt... Wilbur," he says slowly, looking at both of them for his reaction. "Okay. First of all, my interview was shit. Second of all, there were like... at least a hundred other people showed up and didn't need to go to the medical floor."

“Mate,” Phil says, glancing at Wilbur. “Your interview was good.”

“Wait, what?”

“Look,” Wilbur sits on the stool next to him. “We didn’t want some stuck up fuckin’ wanker.”

“Don’t swear, it’s his first day,” Techno adds, glancing up from a book... where the fuck did he get a book from? “Unprofessional. However,” he looks at Tommy, “If you kick Wilbur, I’ll pay you double time.”

“You don’t pay him,” Phil sighs.

Wilbur backs up, hands up in a defence, “Please don’t kick me again. I’ll do almost anything.”

Tommy raises an eyebrow, and looks at the both of them. “He’s scared of me?”

Phil sighs, and runs a hand down his face. “Have the painkillers, Wilbur, stop cowering... Techno, stop laughing. Tommy... you can keep doing whatever you’re doing I guess.”

“Thank you Philza Minecraft,” Tommy says, staring at Phil. Because if Philza Minecraft (the man, myth and legend himself) tells you to do something. You better do it. No questions asked.

He has the painkillers, with a practiced motion that makes Techno raise an eyebrow.

Wilbur still looks quite scared, and keeps his distance from Tommy.

Phil sighs, (again, he seems to be doing that a lot and it's not like Tommy can exactly fault him for that.)

"Right," Phil stands across from the counter. "So... you know what this job entails right."

"Well... I read the email."

"Did Wil not tell you, at your interview?"

"I was slightly occupied!" Wilbur replies, "Broken ribs and all."

Phil rolls his eyes, and waves his hand, which shuts Wilbur up pretty quickly. (Good, Philza Minecraft deserves full respect from everyone.)

Tommy nods, still a bit... shaky. Because of Philza Minecraft. The man himself, with those fabulous wings... and the general coolness.

"One time you stopped a bus from falling-" he says, because he's an idiot with absolutely no filter or control.

Phil smiles, one side of his mouth lifting up. He looks amused. As does Wilbur who's also grinning.

"I did," he confirms, amusement clear in his voice.

"You're so cool," Tommy sighs, "Philza Minecraft everyone."

Wilbur laughs, shaking his head slightly as he did so. "Phil! We hired a fanboy!"

“Leave him alone,” Phil grins, “It might be nice to get at least a bit of respect around here... for a while.”

“Is someone disrespecting you?” Tommy asks, standing up and looking at Wilbur. “I will kick anyone disrespecting you. Are you disrespecting Philza Minecraft?”

“No!” Wilbur cries out, stumbling back and tipping over the back of a couch.

“It appears this fucking idiot, fell over the couch,” a robotic voice... Henry? Says through the room. “Get the fuck back up, Wilbur!”

Techno laughs again, clutching at his stomach.

“What happened to Henry?” Tommy asks.

“I appears that someone who is amazing hijacked my code. I would like to apologise for any things I say while I am a bitch.”

Tommy snorts, and looks at Phil.

Phil sighs.

“I am not dealing with this,” Phil says. “Tommy. Come with me. Wilbur... you have so much paperwork. Techno... rest up.”

“Yes, Dadza.”

“That’s copyrighted,” Techno adds lazily.

Phil shakes his head, and gestures to Tommy.

He gets up.

“Follow me.”

“Yes, Philza Minecraft.”

They walked a short distance, it really wasn’t that far. Down a hallway and to the left.

In the hallway there were ten doors, three of them had golden plaques (were they actually gold?) With *Spectre*, *The Blade* and *Philza* engraved onto them. The other seven didn’t have anything on them, they were just... brown doors.

“Here are our offices,” Phil says, as if Tommy couldn’t guess. “The ones across from us belong to... our team.”

“Team?”

“PR people. All that.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah,” Phil sighs, “We have entire floors dedicated to this shit. Here are our main people. We have agents and stuff up here. Your office space is...” he walks forwards, and taps on the door across from Wilbur’s office. “It’s not huge... but hey.”

The door swings open and Tommy stares at the office it revealed.

Sure it wasn't big.

It had room for a desk, a bookshelf.

And a very, very fancy computer sitting on top of the desk. "Holy shit," Tommy says, before slapping his hand to his mouth. "Am I allowed to swear?"

"Yes, mate," Phil laughs, leaning against the doorframe. "So... basically, you're helping us with paperwork and running the SBI social media pages?"

"Yup," Tommy nods, "I did read the emails."

Phil nods, seemingly amused by the entire situation. "So... you are aware that you are the only outsider who has access to any SBI social media accounts?"

Tommy blinks a few times, at Phil. "I'm what?"

"Well... Wilbur only trusts one other person with his accounts. Techno starts PR nightmares whenever they try to get their hands on his accounts."

"Right," Tommy blinks a few times. "Okay. Okay. So I basically make memes for SBI?"

"And do paperwork," Phil says, still grinning. "Memes and paperwork... that's why we wanted a young person, who's not too uptight. Guess that's you."

“Yes, Philza Minecraft.”

Phil snorts, “Stop that, it’s just Phil.”

“Yes... Phil Minecraft.”

He snorts again, and shakes his head.

“Let us know if you need anything,” Phil says, “We should be just across the hall... we may not though. Then we’ll be in the living area, call out to Henry if you need us. Alright?”

“Alright.”

“He’s being a bit glitchy,” Phil scowls, ever-so slightly. “I think Techno got into his code, I’d say Wilbur otherwise... apart from the fact that he’s fucking banned.”

Phil shrugs, “The cafeteria is on level two, show them your keycard and you can get anything for free. Get used to the programs, passwords are in the book in the drawer. Feel free to bring anything you want.”

“Wait, what am I supposed to be doing?”

Phil laughs, “Get the account on your phone. Document our daily lives... turn it into... something, I dunno, PR said they wanted a day-in-the-life. Guess you could do that, honestly... I don’t really know.”

Tommy nods, before standing up and pulling his phone out of his pocket. “Time to document the... exciting work of SBI.”

Phil laughs.

That's how Tommy finds himself in the cafeteria, long before lunch. His phone propped up using a book and water bottle, while he sits in front of Philza Minecraft, and has been interviewing him.

He's discovered that SBI live exceptionally boring lives... when they're not... crime fighting or whatever. They do normal things, like cry-laugh at a video of a goat fainting (that was Wilbur) and burn toast (that was Techno.)

Tommy had decided this was going to be a terrible video unless he got something exciting to happen.

So now he's interviewing Philza Minecraft. (The man himself.)

"So... Philza," Tommy says, "You've answered the basic questions... that all true fans know. You know what not all fans know? What SBI is called SBI."

Phil blinks at him. "What?"

"What does SBI stand for?" Tommy asks, mainly asking for himself. "I mean... it's a pog name I guess, but has no meaning. It's a bunch of letters. What, does it stand for... Salty Bitches Incorporated?"

"Close," Phil grins, "Really close."

Tommy watches Techno walk past the door.

"Oi! Techno!"

“Mate... I don’t think he’s in a great mood.”

Techno pauses mid-step, and whirls around, a murderous look in his eyes. “What.” He states.

Tommy decides to pick up his phone, and zooms it on Techno looking like he wishes for death. Because... he knows that’ll become a meme template, he just... knows it.

(The advantages of getting a younger person to do this, and suddenly it makes sense why they wanted a younger person to do this role.)

Techno stares, before pulling out a dagger.

It flies over Tommy’s head, and he screeches.

“What the fuck? You could’ve killed me.”

“I didn’t.” Techno deadpans, walking forwards and snatching the phone out of Tommy’s hand.

“Hey! Give that back!” Tommy reaches out, but Techno is grinning and has the camera pointed at him. “No! I’m behind the scenes, gimme the camera back.”

“And here,” Techno deadpans. “We have a wild Tommy, you often find him in his natural habitat... annoying Philza.”

Tommy grabs the water bottle that was holding the phone up and facing Phil. “I will punt you, bitch.”

“I’d like to see you try-”

Tommy throws the water bottle.

It hits Techno square in the forehead.

Tommy snatches the camera back, and picks up the water bottle he's thrown on the ground. He looks at The Blade. The Blade looks back at him.

Then he starts running, and Tommy screams before hiding behind Phil.

“Phil! Phil! Save me!”

Phil laughs.

Somehow... Tommy survives that battle (what can he say, he's just so smart like that, threatening to kick Techno somehow got his to back off, and will make a hilarious bit for the video which is going to be made out of this mess. He's excited to edit it actually.)

Between that, Wilbur ranting about anteaters to Phil. (Who had looked straight at the camera and sighed, like it was the fucking office.) And the interview with Phil, he's pretty sure it'll be enough to make some sort of video.

Which leads Tommy to lunch, eating the roll that he was given. Sitting at a table, stuck between wanting to call Tubbo and Ranboo, and enjoying the silence at the table... look, it had been a lot.

The first day had been... a lot, and Tommy wants a nap.

Someone slams their hand against the table, and Tommy looks up.

To be met with Wilbur, looking down at him, eyes a mixture of concern and annoyance. Ah. Perfect.

“Hey,” Tommy says.

“How are your ribs?” Wilbur asks, sitting across from him.

Tommy thinks for a moment. He... isn't feeling a lot, maybe a mix of high pain tolerance and just... being himself. “Doesn't hurt,” he shrugs and bites into his roll. “I have a high pain tolerance, my roommates joke that I wouldn't know if my leg wasn't attached.”

It is a lame attempt at a joke, anything to make Wilbur laugh and get off his back. But it didn't appear to work.

“That's not always a good thing,” Wilbur says and Tommy hates how gentle he sounds as he says it. “Take care of yourself... please, you're a good kid.”

“I'm fine.”

“He said. Like a liar.”

Tommy glares. Wilbur glares back, just as fierce.

“You sure?” Wilbur says, adjusting his glasses. “Because... you're allowed to be a bit... y'know, not doing so great. I mean... you came in bruised twice.”

Tommy looks at him. “I don't know what you're trying to imply. I don't do subtext, just say it if you're not a pussy.”

Wilbur opens his mouth, face flashing through several different emotions at once.

Tommy shrugs. "Look. Muggings happen."

"Your ribs somehow got worse."

"I'm not careful," Tommy replies, and it's not even that much of a lie. Just enough of the truth where he doesn't feel too bad about lying to anyone. Half-truths, is what Tubbo calls them, and he's gotten very good at telling half-truths. "I'm fine, it's not even your job to worry about me."

Wilbur blinks at him, something behind his eyes which Tommy couldn't identify. "I can still worry about you."

"Well, you don't have to."

"Okay then," Wilbur says, apparently relenting. "Also... Henry said you had more bruises."

"Fuckin' snitch."

"Oi!" He exclaims, "No Henry slander in this house."

Tommy stares at him for a long moment. "It's a fuckin' AI."

Wilbur looks like... Tommy just committed a crime. Or jumped up on the table, did a little dance and yelled out "*I AM A VIGILANTE!*" all things he did not do, he merely just stated that the AI was an AI, and therefore did not have any feelings.

“Take that back right now. You little shit.”

And at that moment.

Three things happen, almost in the span of a few seconds.

One. A gunshot echoes out across the room.

Two. Tommy managed to grab Wilbur and haul him to his side of the table. The side where the gunshot didn't come from.

Three. Flip the table, so that they could hide behind it.

It happens quicker than Tommy can really process, and he's behind the table, catching his breath as he tries to figure out what the best next action is. They can't run out... whoever is... here might not even know. They could be looking the wrong direction entirely.

“Holy shit,” Wilbur whispered, “Holy shit. Holy shit.”

“Don't fucking move,” Tommy hisses back.

Another gunshot, and Tommy winces at the sound of it. “Fuck,” he muttered, spinning around so he can peer out from the side of the table.

Three guys. All with guns. Masks.

And are apparently taking hostages.

Tommy takes a deep breath.

“Is this what you meant when you talked about stressful situations?” He hisses.

Wilbur pauses, mulling it over. “Yeah.”

“Okay, cool, just checking,” Tommy peers around the table again. “How often does this fucking happen?”

“Not that often...” Wilbur says. “It’s difficult to get in here. Holy shit, is Kristin okay?”

“Okay,” Tommy sighs. “How good are you at phasing through bullets?”

“Shit!”

“Shut up, shut up,” Tommy hisses, rather not fancy getting shot today.

Wilbur hisses, checking around the edge of the table before sighing. “Great, my enhancements are basically useless.”

But mine aren't. A voice whispers in the back of his head.

A plan is starting to form in Tommy’s head.

However... it involves a... scary situation, which is probably having a gun pointed at him, and him being used as leverage for Wilbur.

But... hey, he will win.

Tommy takes a deep breath, considering all the options for a long moment.

Then he looks at Wilbur. "I don't wanna get shot today."

Slowly he stands up, hands up in the air.

"No, Tommy!" Wilbur cries out.

Perfect.

Three heads turn to face them.

Three guns are pointed at Tommy and all he can do is take a deep breath, and pray that this isn't the way he's dying. Not when everything's not looking like shit... for once in his sorry life.

"Was that Spectre?" Someone says, and points the gun a bit closer. "Aye, look at this kid."

"Okay, I'm nineteen, what the fuck?"

"Shut it."

For once, Tommy decides now is the time to shut up.

Now what he needs is. Wilbur, to be scared, and to surrender himself. To make a plan with Wilbur while just making eye contact, and maybe drop a piece of wall on them. Or do something when Wilbur isn't looking.

Someone grabs him, and yanks him backwards.

Wilbur makes a noise, but stands up too. "Don't hurt him." He has both hands in the air. "Don't hurt anyone here."

"Dunno," another one of them says, taunting "It'll be fun to make a PR disaster. Kid gets shot... none of the heroes could save him."

Tommy looks at Wilbur.

Wilbur looks back, something like recognition forming in his eyes.

"On the count of three," Tommy mouths and Wilbur flicks his hair back, but it's a nod.

Cool.

This would work fine.

Tommy takes a deep breath, steadying himself.

"One," he mouths.

Wilbur looks ready to grab a chair and throw it.

“Two,” he mouths again, and Wilbur’s eyes have hardened.

Tommy is ready to headbutt.

“Three.”

He throws his head back, hearing something make a crack and whirling around. He grabs the gun, or the arms holding the gun, makes it point up towards the roof.

Still wrestling for the gun and with little hesitation, he fires it. His ears ring.

Making several holes in the ceiling, and probably making it incredibly unsturdy.

He fires it until the gun clicks, the magazine is empty. With a grunt, he yanks the gun out of the person’s hands and uses it to slap them across the face with it.

Wilbur is... somewhere, mostly translucent. Fighting and ducking.

Tommy grabs the gun, pointing it at the two men fighting Wilbur.

“Stop!” Tommy cries out, and is pointing the gun with a bit too steady hands for his liking. *“Guns down.”* He states, and two people are staring at him like he’s crazy...

One of the people staring at him like that is Wilbur.

“I will shoot,” Tommy says, hating how... steady he sounds. He’s supposed to sound at least a little scared, he’s never wielded a gun before. The gun won’t even fire... it’s fucking empty, it’s just a prop. *“Weapons down.”*

Two guns skitter across the floor and Tommy takes a deep breath.

“Right, everything’s resolved,” he stops pointing the gun at anyone. “Excellent. Now... Spectre, what do we do?”

Tommy watches one of the people, reach behind them, then when their arm goes back in front of them. They have a knife... and are running for Wilbur.

The other one has picked up the gun, and is steadying it. Pointed straight between Wilbur’s eyes.

Wilbur who isn’t currently translucent.

Wilbur who’s about to get stabbed or shot, or both if Tommy doesn’t do anything.

He glances up.

That section of ceiling could totally fall down... it’s been shot at, who’s going to see? No one’s here apart from him and Wilbur.

He concentrates his energy, balling it and then... he yanks down a section of ceiling.

It lands on top of the person with a knife, and hits the person who has the gun too.

Wilbur is by his side, and pulling him back away from the people and holding him close by the arm... the ceiling chunk on the floor, and the person trapped underneath it.

They'd be fine, ceiling bits didn't hurt too much. It would cost more in property damage anyway.

Tommy lets himself stare at the mess. One of the people are unconscious (the one he pistol whipped), one of them is trapped under a bit of rubble, it's not severe enough to kill, or really injure him, but still traps him. The one who had the gun, was on his knees, hands behind his head and gun thrown across the floor.

"Stressful enough situation for you?" Tommy whispers.

"Holy shit," Wilbur whispers "Holy shit." he says louder.

And yeah... yeah... holy shit sums it up pretty well.

Chapter End Notes

Hey all! This is... Ellis (the co-author) here. It's nice to have all of you reading, and it's super fun to write for this story. (It's my second time writing for this story, and it lowkey slaps) thanks for all the support! It means a lot!

In Which Tommy Deals With The Aftermath

Chapter Notes

Ellis wrote this whole chapter

Say it with me "Thank you for the food, Ellis :)"

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Holy shit,” Phil says, pacing up and down in front of both Tommy and Wilbur.

They’re on the hospital floor, Tommy’s legs dangling over the edge of the bed, as a medic checks him absentmindedly.

His ribs still hurt like a bitch, but otherwise... are alright, he’s had worse and he didn’t sustain anymore injuries. So he’ll survive this one, still the medic was checking over both him and Wilbur.

Wilbur did somehow get a cut across his nose.

(Tommy has no clue how, at what stage in that entire thing could Wilbur get a cut across his nose. “Roofing...” is all Wilbur had said and then shuddered like that explained a fucking thing.)

“Are you alright?” Wilbur asks, snapping Tommy out of his thoughts. “I mean... that was kinda a lot, you dealt with it well though.”

“I’m good.”

Phil stops, clapping his hands together. “What the fuck?” He says, in a fake cheery tone.

“Well,” Tommy claps his hands, matching the tone. “Some guys decided to attack the tower.” He claps his hands together again to match Phil’s energy. “And they were rootin’ and tootin’ and were gonna be shootin’.”

Wilbur stifles a laugh next to him. “I mean, kid’s ain’t wrong.”

“Wilbur, shut up,” Techno adds and Phil shoots him a grateful smile.

Techno is... glaring, straight at Tommy and he’s going to ignore that for a later time. A future him problem, as one might say.

Tommy swings his legs, mostly because he’s watching Phil walk back and forth and secondly because he doesn’t know jackshit about anything.

“Why?” Phil asks, looking up to the heavens. “Why hast thou forsaken me?”

“The fuck?” Tommy says, “Ain’t that... Shakespeare or some shit.”

Wilbur raises an eyebrow from the bed across from him. “You did graduate high school... right?”

“Yes!” Tommy says, and for once he isn’t even lying. He did online high school, the whole time and everything. His diploma is... somewhere, it’s probably being used as a fucking coaster.

Look... it’s a house of teenage boys. What do you expect?

Wilbur looks... doubtful, to say the least. “Oh yeah? How do you find the area of a right angled triangle?”

“Oi,” Tommy snaps. “You didn’t know what object permanence was.”

“I did!”

“Did not. You’re in denial.”

“What the fuck are you on about?”

“Denial.” Tommy repeats. “Also, it depends... for the right angle thing. Maybe pythagoras... maybe sin, tan, cos, all that shit. Really, really depends. Half base, times vertical height.”

Phil sighs, “Boys!”

“Yes?” Wilbur replies, grinning like a shithead and Tommy does the same thing.

“We just had three people attack the tower.”

“Huh,” Tommy shrugs, “Really? Wilbur, do you hear this guy?”

“The tower was attacked?” Wilbur asks, fake shock lacing his point and Tommy’s suppressing his laughter. “Wow... someone should’ve told me.”

“Wait,” Tommy frowns, thinking about the process of him getting into the tower.

He had gone through two security checks, and Kristin had given him the keycard which then gave him access to everything. But before that, he wouldn’t have been able to get anywhere apart from the foyer, and would’ve been escorted quickly after that.

“How did they get in?” Tommy asks.

The silence, and realisation sits around them for a long dreadful moment.

“Oh,” Phil says, rapidly paling. “Oh!”

“I dunno,” Techno deadpans, eyes deadly slits and directed at Tommy. “Why don’t you tell us, Thomas?”

“Woah!” Wilbur stands up, “The fuck is that supposed to mean?”

“You know what I’m implying, Wilbur,” Techno says, tone dangerously level. “You said it yourself, Tommy dealt with it well.”

“What the fuck?” Tommy says, and is promptly ignored.

“Too well,” Techno continues, still glaring at Tommy. “What sort of nineteen year old just does that like it’s nothing?”

Tommy sighs internally.

There is a very clear course of action here... very, very clear.

Techno’s right, most nineteen year olds would be having mental breakdowns. Not just be sitting here like it’s another Wednesday, because... it kinda is another Wednesday to Tommy.

So the obvious option here is to... well, freak out.

And Tommy, he was a broke child once. He knows how to fake tears, fuck, he knows how to fake sob.

It's not a matter of if, it's a matter of when.

In the background, Tommy notices another hero. Dream. Famous for wearing a mask, and famous for never showing his face to anyone. Even now he's wearing it, and a bright green costume which is as ugly as it is green.

Tommy tilts his head.

The man's talking to another medic, but his gaze flickers over... at least he assumes that he has no way of actually knowing where the man is looking, but he can feel eyes on him.

"There's something going on here," Techno states, and points a finger at Tommy. "And you have something to do with it."

And Tommy... Tommy is gonna guilt trip this man so hard.

He lets several tears drip from his eyes.

Then tries to wipe those tears away as quickly as he can, slapping his hand over his mouth.

Just to really sell it.

It seems to work, considering no one noticed.

But there are tear marks there.

Dream must have noticed, because he's walking over, and pushes in between a still arguing Techno and Wilbur.

"Hey?" He asks, his voice all kindness. "Are you okay kid?"

Tommy nods and wipes at his eyes. "Yeah, yeah, it's been a rough first day."

Dream laughs.

"Look what you did!" Wilbur yells, "You made him cry!"

"Me?" Techno asks, and then looks at Tommy, his mouth slightly open. "Yeah... I probably did. And I'd do it again."

"Please," Phil sighs, "Not now."

Tommy smiles, and lets it be watery.

Internally he is cackling.

This is the funniest thing he's ever done in his whole damn life.

And he once watched Tubbo get his knee stuck in a mug (long story short, don't try and fit your knee in a mug. It ends up with shards of mug everywhere.)

“You’re safe now,” Phil says, “And you did well.”

Tommy sees the golden opportunity.

If he’s gonna do this... he’s gonna commit.

So he bursts out into tears.

Then immediately curls up on himself, pressing his hands to his eyes and letting some ugly sobbing noises escape his mouth.

Damn. He really is selling this.

A bit too well-

“I was scared,” Tommy manages, through tears and hiccups which might not be fake anymore. “And I threatened someone with a gun, holy shit, I could’ve killed someone. The ceiling might have killed someone!”

“Hey, hey, hey,” Phil says, and is crouching in front of Tommy. His eyes are so soft that it almost makes Tommy feel bad. “Everyone’s alright, what you did was right. You were really brave.”

Tommy laughs, and sniffs, and... damn he really isn’t faking these tears anymore.

“Pft,” Tommy sniffs to himself, “No one’s said that before.”

The look of concern on Phil’s face was almost laughable, but it still made Tommy feel slightly warm and fuzzy inside. Almost safe.

“Look what you did,” Wilbur whispers, and Tommy pretends he couldn’t hear it. “You made the kid cry!”

“Don’t tell me it isn’t fishy,” Techno says, apparently not even denying that he made Tommy cry. “That he rocks up…”

“It wasn’t him,” Phil snaps with an awful amount of confidence.

“There is a staggering amount of proof!” Techno yells.

“There’s actually no proof that Thomas is involved in any way.” Dream interrupts, making everyone look at him “He was the one I was immediately suspicious of, since he’s new here and all.”

He picks up the tablet that’s usually attached to his belt, doing something on it before turning it for the four to see. It was camera footage of Tommy on the day of the interview “He was more concentrated in getting to his interview than anything else, he almost fell asleep in the waiting room as well.” He turns the tablet off “Also, seeing as he threatened to shoot someone for Wilbur, I highly doubt he has anything to do with the attack.”

Techno narrows his eyes at Dream “That doesn’t exactly prove him innocent.”

Dream nods “True, but it’s evidence. Again, I highly doubt Thomas is involved, just because he didn’t react immediately doesn’t mean anything, sometimes you just need someone to remind you of the situation for you to go into a state of shock. It’s normal.”

Techno’s expression shifts, but only for a moment, then he’s deadpan again.

"Delayed reaction," Phil says and looks pointedly at Techno. "You know about those."

Techno opens his mouth, closes it and generally just looks like a goldfish.

“Also,” Dream adds, “There’s this footage... it’s slightly spotty. But we can track where Thomas was the entire day. From getting past the security checkpoints to... now really, it’s a bit spotty when we were attacked.”

He turns the tablet to face Tommy.

“In fact, the only still working camera is from the hallway. But you can just see Thomas... he’s those pixels,” he points to a slightly different colour of pixels on the screen. “Look. He is so small. It looks like he’d sneeze and snap in half.”

Tommy glares, and Dream just laughs.

Everyone stares at each other for a long moment. Not quite sure what to say.

So Tommy just looks at Techno. “You made me cry.”

Techno opens his mouth, closes it and then shrugs.

“Apologise.” Phil says, looking over his shoulder.

“What? No!”

“Apologise.” Phil repeats, and if Tommy didn’t know better, he’d say Phil sounds amused.

“No! I’m not some kid, you can’t just force me to get along with people I don’t like.”

Phil gives a look. "I'll change the Netflix password."

"Ugh. Fine," Techno turns, so he's looking at Tommy. "Tommy... I am very, very, very sorry for making you cry and I will totally never do it again."

"Techno!"

"Phil?"

"Apologise properly."

Techno stamps his foot against the ground and groans. "Phil." He draws out the word impossibly long, and Phil just smiles into his hand. "Phil. Please."

"Apologise, mate."

Techno takes a deep breath, and his face screws up like he's in the most pain that he's ever been in. "I... Techno, am sorry that I made you. Thomas- what's your last name?"

"Underscore," Wilbur adds, and is met with several confused eyes. "What? I interviewed him."

"You remembered it?" Tommy asks, and grins. "But yes. Thomas Underscore."

Techno takes another deep breath, and screws up his face again. "Thomas Underscore, for making you cry. Despite the fact that you're incredibly sketchy... and despite the fact there were no witnesses apart from you and Wilbur, you're unreliable and Wilbur was busy."

“There’s some camera footage,” Dream says, and gestures vaguely at his blank tablet. “It’s all glitched out though, a bunch of red spots show up in the video... it’s really, really weird honestly. But it’s done that before.”

“Red spots?” Techno asks, stopping his apology. “Huh?”

“Eh,” Phil waves a hand, “The cameras here are sketchy... that’s saying the least, we should really invest in better cameras.”

Tommy pulls a face, and blinks a few times. “Wait, what?”

“Well, we don’t really count on people getting in-” Techno starts.

Phil gives him a look.

“I’m sorry for making you cry,” Techno mutters, “There. Happy?”

“Sorry,” Tommy grins, tilting his head a little. “I didn’t hear you.”

Techno basically deflates, and Dream chuckles to himself. Wilbur is grinning into his hand and Tommy... is having the best time of his life.

“You heard him,” Phil shrugs.

Techno opens his mouth. “I’m sorry. Tommy.” He grits out, like every single word is paining him and stabbing him in the leg or anything. Then Techno looks at Phil, his expression blank, but somehow still being offended. “I hate you.”

And Tommy... Tommy lets himself laugh.

(Even if it hurts his ribs.)

After he's controlled his laughter, Wilbur is also grinning.

"You should go home mate," Phil says, "It's been a long day. You deserve the day off."

"I'll drive him!" Wilbur says, standing up from his bed and grinning widely.

Tommy resists the urge to groan, and runs a hand down his face. "The tower gets attacked once and I gotta go home?"

"Yes."

"Right," Tommy sighs, "Cool."

Phil snorts, and Wilbur gives a wider grin, before throwing his arm around Tommy's shoulders and hugging him a bit too tight.

So. That was the long, and short, of how Tommy was put into a car. With Spectre... y'know a proper superhero.

The car was a real fancy one, electric and shit, charges. It was a sleek car too, looking all fancy like, and was going to stick out like a fucking neon giraffee in the artic.

It was too bad Wilbur was a shit driver.

In fact, he was so shit at driving, that fucking, Tubbo. Tubbo Underscore, who couldn't drive, and was never allowed to hold a license (legally too, the government said so. Long story.) Would be crying at the way that Wilbur drove.

He drove like it was Mario Kart.

“You drive like shit!” Tommy yells, gripping onto the dashboard.

“I’m driving like a normal fucking person!”

“You cut in front of that other car! This is why we need to eat the rich!”

Wilbur huffs, and spins the wheel in a way that had Tommy slamming against the side of the door.

Tommy screeches, because, ouch, his ribs but also mostly for the fun of it, and to annoy Wilbur (two birds, one stone and all that shit).

“Holy shit!” Wilbur screeches back, “I’m not even that bad!”

“Trust me,” Tommy laughs, a mixture of fear and... yeah no, just fear. “You are! I have driven with people who the government has said can never get a licence and- ah!”

Again, he’s thrown against the side of the door.

This really can’t be good for his poor, poor, innocent ribs.

They halt to a stop and Tommy’s thrown forwards slightly in his seat, seatbelt slamming against his front.

“Fuck!” Tommy yells, and takes a long moment to regain any thoughts that are practical. He’s breathing heavily and looking at Wilbur, like he’s crazy. Wilbur just... looked like he was a little bit crazed.

“Holy shit,” Wilbur laughs, his face alight with something. “We should be dead.”

“You were driving like that... on purpose?”

“Yup,” Wilbur grins, then his face drops, “Are your ribs okay?”

“Yeah,” Tommy smiles, wincing slightly. “I’m good.”

Wilbur doesn’t look convinced, but he nods slowly.

“Techno doesn’t mean it,” Wilbur says, not quite looking at Tommy. “The whole accusation thing, he knows he’s talking shit but... years on this job give you some trust issues. He’s worse than the rest of us, but... he doesn’t mean it. Techno also doesn’t know how to apologise.”

“A shock.” Tommy deadpans and Wilbur snorts.

“Yeah,” Wilbur says. “He’s just scared of us getting hurt, and no offence, but you’re the easiest to lash out on when there’s an unknown factor here.”

“Someone on the inside helped them,” Tommy says thoughtfully, and glances out of his window. “Who was in the tower at the time?”

“Don’t mind it,” Wilbur puts a hand on Tommy’s shoulder. It’s fleeting, but the touch is nice. “Let us figure it out, just... do your job and have fun. You’re young.”

Tommy nods, and moves his shoulder to brush Wilbur's hand away.

He looks up and around.

The apartment... does not look great. Tommy will give them that, there are bits of it falling apart. One of the mailboxes against the wall doesn't close properly, there are newspapers, bits of paper and... the door up to the landing didn't close right.

He wrinkles up his nose.

"You live like this?" Wilbur asks.

Tommy stares at him for a long moment, he takes off his seatbelt, and opens the door slowly. "Well, not all of us make a hero wage. Or were adopted by some netherite transport millionaire who also happens to be one of the biggest heroes in the world."

"Okay," Wilbur says. "Okay, fine, you win this one."

"I'm living pay cheque to pay cheque, Wilbur," Tommy laughs, stepping out of the car. "You're going to win in the long run."

"Huh?"

Tommy looks at Wilbur, closing the car door as Wilbur gets out of his side.

"Well... any medical bills will fuck me up," Tommy says, walking towards the door and wiggling it to get it open. "Anything really... my roommates don't have any cover either."

Wilbur blinks at him, “Surely you get medical, vigilante, villain and hero cover... while working with us. You have to, right?”

“Maybe, not necessarily a given,” Tommy held the door open and Wilbur winced at the stairs.

Look. The stairs weren’t the best. Only one of them was falling apart, and that one was intact just enough for Tommy to climb up it. Ranboo could step over it, Tommy could step on the supports under the step.

Tubbo... Tubbo struggled, that’s for sure.

He clambered up, and reached his door.

“You fuckin’ live like this?” Wilbur asks, again, nose wrinkled at some of the dodgy stains.

“Don’t touch those,” Tommy adds, he pauses, wriggles the door handle and sighs. “It’s fuckin’ locked.”

“Oh?”

“Don’t worry, there’s a fire escape. Be right back.”

Tommy runs down the stairs, and hears footsteps behind him. Looking back over his shoulder he looks at Wilbur, who is following him, phone at the ready and grinning.

“Gotta get the proof, y’know.”

Tommy sighs and goes around to the back.

There are several dumpsters. Made for the sole purpose of clambering up to the fire escape to unlock the door.

He pulls himself up, and onto the escape, before walking the short distance to the window. He opens it, before looking at Wilbur, who is trying to pull himself up onto the fire escape and looks like a fish.

Tommy laughs. “You look so fuckin’ stupid.”

Wilbur looks up at him, “How the fuck did you do that so easily?”

“Look,” Tommy crouches down, but does not offer a hand. Instead just smiling at Wilbur. “You’re a rich kid, you can see it in your eyes and the faces you pulled. Let’s just say, I grew up being posted through windows to unlock doors.”

“You scare me.”

“Good.” Tommy grins, and offers his hand.

Eventually they’re both settled inside, and Wilbur is walking around, judging everything.

“I can not believe that you live like this.”

Tommy looks around, it’s pretty clean. For them at least, it’s not... gross, there’s just things everywhere.

Wilbur looks around, and picks up the remote (which was stacked precariously on a stack of bowls, plates and cutlery that Tommy was planning on washing.) The TV turns on and the news channel fades into the background.

His fucking diploma is being used to hold up part of a bookshelf. He hums, in amusement to himself.

“There’s my diploma,” Tommy adds and gestures at the bookshelf. “Holding up the bookshelf, you can read it if you’d like.”

Wilbur does, or at least crouches down and pretends to read it. He pulls a face and grimaces. “This is... concerning.”

“This is how I live, prep boy. Did you go to a private school?”

“Yeah.”

“How much did it cost?”

“Phil said... about five thousand per semester.”

Tommy whistles, it's low and he rolls his eyes. "Gee... eat the rich. That could buy so much rent here."

Wilbur looks at him, eyes legitimately confused. “Alrighty, there’s a class gap.”

“I’d fuckin’ say,” Tommy mutters, unlocking the front door and gestures at Wilbur. “Alright mate, get the fuck outta the building. You dropped me off, went up a fire escape. Showed the vast socioeconomic differences and that you’re a privileged, rich, white kid.”

Wilbur smiles, and it doesn’t quite reach his eyes. “I’m sorry.”

“Oh fuck off with that,” Tommy says, and puts his hands on Wilbur’s shoulders and starts pushing. “I don’t need any of your fuckin’ sympathy, it’s the way things are here.”

He starts pushing at Wilbur, and Wilbur obliges and starts walking towards the door.

“*Vigilantes are starting to team up,*” the reporter says through the TV and Wilbur freezes. Tommy does too, but for what he guesses is a completely different reason. Tommy looks up at the reporter.

He clears his throat and runs a hand through his hair. “*Reports from around the country say that vigilantes... are starting to make teams. Similar to SBI or The Dream Team, they’re starting to work together. Who is behind this cohesive network, is yet to be known.*”

Wilbur screws up his face.

Tommy grins.

“Why are you grinning?” Wilbur asks.

“Why wouldn’t I?” Tommy looks at the TV and it moves along to someone else talking about the impacts of this. “Vigilantes are like superheroes... but don’t have people telling them shit to do. They’re quicker and have less rules and regulations to go around.”

“That’s what makes them so dangerous.”

“Haven’t you seen that video?” Tommy asks, “The one of that one hero waiting at a burning building, because he didn’t have permission from the higher ups and Purpled runs in and does the hero's job for him.”

Wilbur pulls a face.

“Also,” Tommy adds, “No one patrols here.”

“Wait, what?”

“They call Logstechire ‘where the exiled go’ for a reason,” Tommy muses, and Wilbur looks slightly horrified. “Go and sleep in your fancy bed.”

Wilbur leaves.

Tommy is left by himself for a while.

So, like the good roommate he is, he cleans.

The dishes were cleaned, things were put away. Shoes were lined up neatly, and Tommy even got so bored he started actually looking at what food was out of date, and what the groceries looked like for next week.

He’s back on the couch eventually, in a slightly too clean apartment, (he even cleaned his room and cleaned Ranboo’s side of Tubbo’s and Ranboo’s shared room. Tubbo’s stayed untouched... he’d learnt better after the incident of the on-fire apartment.)

That’s how he finds himself in front of Tubbo’s laptop, paying too much for editing software and going fucking ham. Mostly out of boredom, and something to occupy his hands with as he waits for his other two roommates to return.

(It’s only just past three, Tubbo normally gets back around four and Ranboo normally gets back around five or six.)

Something about editing was... almost relaxing, it was never difficult and Tommy had fun doing it. Between some good teachers, and classes in his final year of high school, it had been a fun time.

The door opens, and both Ranboo and Tubbo stumble in.

“Hello?”

“There was an attack,” Tubbo pants out, gripping onto the wall. “On the tower. We had to check on you, are you okay?”

“What a first day.”

“Yeah,” Tommy laughs, “I interviewed Phil, almost got killed by Techno, got my own office. Got a gun pointed at me, then threatened someone with an empty gun, got blamed, started crying to throw them off... got a lift home from Wilbur and locked out, so I went through the fire escape and Wilbur followed me. Found out that he hated vigilantes.”

Ranboo whistles, lowly, “That’s quite a first day.”

“Yeah...” Tommy mutters, “Yeah, I’d say it is.”

“I’m glad you’re okay,” Tubbo says, “I haven’t run this fast in my life. You weren’t responding to messages.”

Tommy looks at his phone, on the couch, and reaches over to pick it up. Sure enough, there are several messages from Tubbo and Ranboo. There’s even one from Wilbur. (When did Wilbur get his number?)

He smiles, “Thanks, Tubbo.”

Tubbo grumbles, and stomps over.

But throws his arms around Tommy nonetheless, and hugs him tightly.

“I hate you,” Tubbo grumbles. “I’m going to steal your wallet.”

And considering Tubbo gave him that warning, Tommy would guess that Tubbo already had it.

When Tubbo let go, he was holding Tommy’s wallet in one hand, and his phone in the other hand. “Found anything good?” Tubbo opens his wallet and starts looking through it.

“Good ol’ Tubbo,” Ranboo mutters.

The silence settles, it’s not uncomfortable, the silence has never been uncomfortable when it comes to them. Some odd mix of being each other’s friends and families and caring about each other.

Tommy relaxes into the couch.

Knowing his luck, this peace will not stay this way for too long.

Chapter End Notes

AAuthor here, haven't been writing some of these chapters for a bunch of reasons but also my computer isn't working, so that sucks

Thank you Ellis my beloved for this chapter /p

In Which Tommyinnit's Idol Gets A New Colour of Shoe

Chapter Notes

WARNING! VOMIT! TOMMY VOMITS QUITE A BIT IN THIS PART

Ellis is back at it again with an amazing chapter

-AAuthor

I am back at it again, got obsessed with this story

- Ellis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Tubbo.”

Silence.

“Tubbo.”

A bit more silence.

“Tubbo.”

A sigh, but still Tommy was being ignored.

“Tubbo,” Tommy complained, “I’m hungry.”

“Ugh,” Tubbo looks up from his maths. Maths that Tommy couldn’t even look at without wanting to be sick. “Boo boy.”

Ranboo looks up from his book, giving a blank look at everyone. Like he'd rather be literally anywhere else other than here. "Yes."

"Make food," Tubbo says, looking back down at his maths work.

"Why me?"

"Because we hate you," Tommy deadpans, "Couldn't we just order something?"

Tubbo and Ranboo both look at him, looking slightly offended that he'd even think of that.

"Does it look like we can afford that?" Ranboo says and Tommy sighs.

"I'm hungry."

"You can survive one day without eating," Ranboo says, "We literally don't have anything, or any money."

"Ranboo."

Ranboo looks at him, it's slightly sympathetic, but first and foremost, it's tired. A sort of tired that is deep set into his bones, and if Tommy didn't feel that. "Look, we don't have anything. I get paid tomorrow, you get paid..."

"In another week," Tommy sighs, "How far can we push our money until then?"

“We can do that,” Tubbo says, glancing up from his maths. “Just buy bread and one of those packs of sausages... that’ll be like ten dollars and get us through.”

Ranboo looks at Tubbo for a long moment, he in fact sets his book down at his side, “Nutrition? Isn’t Tommy vegetarian?”

“No,” Tubbo and Tommy chide, at the same time. “We can’t afford to be vegetarian,” Tubbo adds at the end.

“Meat makes him sick,” Ranboo argues, which is a good argument, “He can’t just eat it for a week.”

“It’s fine,” Tommy says, “I’ve done worse. I’ll just be a bit weaker... I’ll avoid patrol or something.”

Ranboo sighs, but picks up his book again, and glances at Tommy. “We can probably afford some ramen... or something.”

“Maybe,” Tubbo says, “Hopefully.”

They could not afford more than a few ramen cups. Three... then they needed to save the rest for rent, bills and then throw a little bit into the savings account... which was slowly (very slowly) rising, hopefully it could be spent on something more one day.

The days plodder on, with Tommy and his interesting diet.

Making him feel worse and worse each day.

Wednesday was a fine day at work. He finished up editing that video (that took the entire day) and didn’t eat any food at the cafeteria, because his stomach was lurching dangerously the entire day.

Thursday... was slightly worse. He'd talked with Wilbur at some point, but he'd felt too sick to even notice anything, and he didn't even do any work. He sat in his office and tried not to vomit too much.

He knew Friday wasn't going to be great. Before it even started.

"Hello!" Kristin says, her voice cheery and Tommy gave a smile. "Oh... you don't look so well, do you need to go home?"

"Gotta get that money," Tommy manages, his stomach flipping and the feel of complete nausea. "The grind never stops."

Kristen smiles, and nods, "Go on in."

Tommy does, clutching at his bag and taking some careful steps. Trying not to let the tidal way of... whatever spill.

It was easy enough to pull a face and keep on his way to the office.

He did the work asked of him, and started to get a hold over what sort of social media they used. Who the SBI accounts needed to follow to look good, and read more about algorithms than he could ask for in a lifetime.

Overall, it was a pretty good start to the day.

Which was shattered, when Tommy forces himself away from his desk and bolts to the nearest bathroom.

Then he lands on the ground, and everything that was in his stomach is now in the toilet bowl.

Tommy groans, clutching onto either side of the toilet bowl and lurches again.

His mouth tastes of vomit, and the general feeling of sadness, and he groans again as he feels the vomit rise up in him and clutches onto the toilet, knuckles turning white.

He sighs, and turns around, leaning against the toilet and sighing. Grabbing his phone, he looks at himself staring back at the camera. Kindly put, he looks like a fucking mess, his hair is completely ruined, with his ponytail slipping out, his eyes are tired and he looks like he's sick... which he is, but... shit.

"Shit," Tommy vocalises, the first thing which isn't him retching, sighing or being in pain. "Great luck," he mutters, mostly a bitter thing. "Guess I'll die here."

For a while, he sits there in silence.

Then there are heavy footsteps, and a knock on the door.

"Tommy."

Ah. The Blade, great, fantastic, the only man who actively hates him here and was going to throw hands with him.

"I know you're in here, I looked at the security cameras."

"Fuck off," Tommy says, kicking at the door. "Let me die in peace."

“As much as I’d love to,” Techno says, and he sounds like there isn’t one word of lie in that sentence, “I believe Wilbur would kill me. Are you alright?”

“Yes. I just chose to hide in here, you’re so smart.”

“Okay. What’s wrong?”

And... Tommy’s body, while it has been beaten and abused at the hands of himself doing patrol. While his ribs are constantly in some sort of pain and he’s constantly covered in some sort of bruises.

His body always gets the last laugh.

Because, that was the moment when he lurched and turned around frantically, clutching onto the toilet bowl and vomited.

It was an ugly sound.

Techno makes a noise, it sounds just as painful as Tommy’s retching. “Right,” Techno says and sighs. “What happened?”

“Haven’t been eating right,” Tommy managed, shocked at his honesty. He needs a lie, and he needs a lie quickly. He’s not powerful to these guys, he’s powerless, named Thomas Underscore and nineteen. “Parents were some sort of avian hybrid, I can’t eat meat.”

“Oh,” Techno says, “Wait... why haven’t you been eating properly?”

“Money,” Tommy grits out and clutches the toilet bowl, his stomach lurches, but he doesn’t throw up. “I needed something... I can’t just eat bread.”

Techno sighs, “There isn’t much else to do but wait it out,” he says. His voice is... slightly softer than usual. Not a huge amount, but just enough for Tommy to notice.

“I fuckin’ hate this,” Tommy says, meaning every word.

It’s cramped, Tommy’s sitting in a weird way, his throat hurts and his hands hurt from gripping onto the side of the toilet bowl. It’s his... third day at work, and it feels like everything is already falling apart.

“Wow this has been a shit show,” Tommy laughs and he knows how bitter it sounds. “I’ve really fucked this job up.”

“Not really,” Techno says, “You can always do worse.”

“Thanks. Really helpful.”

“No problem,” Techno adds, and Tommy can hear the smile in that prick’s voice. “Look... you haven’t been fired, even if you were fired, you’d get a letter of recommendation from one of us. That guarantees you most jobs.”

Tommy huffs.

Techno makes a non-committal sound.

“Look,” Techno says, “I’ve thrown up in this bathroom before. It is not the best throwing up bathroom. We have better ones.”

“Supportive,” Tommy muses, but pauses. “Which one’s the best?”

“The one at my apartment,” Techno laughs, “Wilbur’s is... okay, slightly too much room to sit against the wall. Phil’s house isn’t great, his toilet is separate and it’s all cramped. The ones in the tower aren’t great.”

“You don’t live together?” Tommy asks weakly.

“We’re all adults, Tommy, of course we don’t.”

“You’re all liars to the media,” Tommy manages, and his stomach lurches dangerously again. “Next you’ll tell me you don’t have family dinners.”

“That’s true,” Techno adds, sounding very amused. “Sometimes we’ll just sit on top of the tower and eat Chinese food. Are you scared of heights?”

“No.”

“Cool, just checking. Knowing Phil, he’s gonna put you up there at some point.”

“Looking forward to it.” Tommy muses.

He feels the vomit rising, and pauses, moving so he’s in a slightly better spot and gags... much to his disgust, he doesn’t vomit anything, only saliva and he groans at the strain that puts on his throat.

Wow. He really fucking hates this.

“You’re alright,” Techno says, and the door is open... somehow, and Tommy isn’t going to think about it too hard. “This bit always sucks.”

Tommy tries to nod, but feels nauseous again and basically puts his head half way into the toilet bowl. It's... not the most glamorous place Tommy's ever been in, but hey, at least this toilet is clean... and not a public toilet.

That was not a good time in Tommy's life.

Techno doesn't say anything when Tommy gets his face out of the toilet bowl, instead he brandishes a hair band and ties the top part of his hair out of his face.

Tommy mutters a thanks, but it's muffled with the sounds of Tommy retching again.

Techno has a hold of some of the strands of hair that the pony tail didn't quite manage. And Tommy is... surprisingly okay with it.

His ponytail gets redone, with less strands and he groans while clutching onto the toilet like his entire life depends on it. "I can eat chicken," Tommy muses, in a moment of calmness.

"Aren't you part avian?"

"Parents were," Tommy says, "The irony isn't lost on me."

"Chicken's cheap."

"Not fuckin' cheap enough," Tommy mutters, "Hence why I'm here."

Tommy lurches forwards and vomits again. Techno mutters something behind him, but considering Tommy's face was half way in the toilet... he didn't hear whatever Techno had to say.

“Pardon?” Tommy asks, wiping his mouth on the bottom of his shirt. It’s gross, that’s for fucking sure, but still, not the lowest point in his life. That award would have to go to... another time.

“We need to move,” Techno says, sounding strained “This can not be practical for you.”

“I’m not vomiting into a bucket.”

“We have an entire medical floor. You need water, at least.”

“Ugh.”

Still, Tommy lets Techno help him up onto his feet and takes a few careful steps with Techno walking behind him. They’re careful steps, and Techno looks like he’s about to either cuss Tommy out, or catch him if he falls.

Tommy really hopes he’ll get caught.

“You need to watch your diet,” Techno says, “You still need protein and stuff.”

“I don’t like eggs,” Tommy manages, walking past a nice looking pot plant.

“Chicken is protein,” Techno says, “You need chicken.”

Tommy laughs, and the pair of them manage to get into the elevator. Without Tommy throwing up, it’s quite impressive.

“You’ll be vomiting until you can get... whatever, out of your system.”

He nods, and grips onto the bar inside the elevator. It dings, all nice like as well.

The elevator shifts to a start and as it does so, Tommy feels the vomit rise up in his guts. He leans over, and there's a vomit bag being shoved in front of him, which Tommy grips like the entire world depends on it and vomits for what feels like the thousandth time.

Tommy looks up, and Techno looks both concerned and smug, despite looking quite pale.

"Piss off," Tommy manages, he glances down at the vomit bag and then looks at Techno and smiles slightly. "I fuckin' hate you."

Techno shrugs and the elevator dings open.

The medical floor every time Tommy has been here (three times... that's worrying to say the least), has been at least a little bit busy. With people bustling, and a range of injuries, from scratches... to people being hid behind giant sheets and quiet whispers.

Yeah... Tommy didn't love this place.

Techno sighs, "Alright. You're going to sit down. Probably vomit for a bit. Then I'll get you some KFC."

"I haven't had it in so long," Tommy says wistfully and smiles. "Probably back when I was little."

"Let's move on from how upsetting that is. You deserve some chicken."

Tommy laughs, it's a short thing, before he's sitting on a bed. Surrounded by vomit bags.

Techno spots Wilbur, and walks over to him. They both keep glancing at Tommy, and Wilbur sighs, rolls his eyes and looks back at his phone.

They keep talking, occasionally glancing at Tommy.

And about ten minutes later, a poor intern walks in with a bucket filled with deep fried chicken and Tommy pretends he doesn't notice until the bucket is essentially dumped on the bed.

Tommy puts it on his lap, and starts going at it. If he vomits all of this up, then he's not going to be too upset.

The chicken is... so good, it's been so long since he's had chicken. Let alone KFC, the greasiest, unhealthiest thing ever

"We can't let Phil know," Wilbur says as he gets closer. "We can't have a repeat of The Great Chicken Incident of 2018."

"No," Techno shudders slightly and shakes his head. "If Phil finds out... we're doomed."

"The what?" Tommy asks, mouth stuffed with deep fried goodness. "Huh?"

Techno shakes his head, "Don't worry about it. Wilbur, keep Phil away from the medical floor--"

"Why?" A voice that is Philza Minecraft, the man himself says.

Both Techno and Wilbur jump. Wilbur screeches, Techno pulls a knife from... somewhere, (where did he get the knife from.) Techno then moves so that he's in front of Tommy, and Tommy can't see Phil.

“Phil!” Wilbur exclaims. “Hello!”

“What are you hiding?” Phil says straight away, and if Tommy could see him, he imagined Phil trying to look past them. “Techno... Wilbur... who is hiding behind you two?”

Techno and Wilbur glance at each other.

“Why do you think that?” Wilbur steps to the side, and blocks Phil’s view. “Honestly, Techno is anyone here?”

“Nope.” Techno says and Tommy can imagine how awkward that Techno’s being. “No one. In fact... let’s go and just, go on patrol. Yup. Patrol.”

Phil sighs, and picks up Wilbur like it’s nothing.

Puts him back on the ground and looks at Tommy, mouth open.

Techno covers his ears, and dives over the bed.

Wilbur looks... terrified.

Tommy bites into the drumstick and grins at Phil. “Hey.”

“You’re... part avian,” Phil says, “Your records say that you’re part avian.”

“That is correct,” Tommy grins and bites into the chicken leg. “So I can’t eat meat.”

“You’re eating chicken!” Phil yells, “You are part bird.”

“Uh... not really.”

“Phil,” Techno starts, peering out from behind the bed. “It’s his choice-”

“Who ordered it?” Phil asks. “Why is a part... avian eating *chicken*. ”

“I don’t like eggs,” Tommy adds and puts one of the bones into the bucket and again, grins at Phil. “What’s wrong Phil?”

“I will fire you.”

Tommy raises an eyebrow.

Now... his body gets the last laugh.

Because he vomits... on Philza Minecraft’s shoes.

It’s a little bit funny.

A little.

Not a lot though, because Tommy will never live this down.

He vomited on his idol. Philza Minecraft, the only man ever.

This is it. This is his lowest moment.

Not when his parents died, or when he thought he lost Tubbo in the mall, or when Ranboo teleported him and Tommy vomited on their carpet.

This. Vomiting on Philza fucking Minecraft.

He's going to kill Techno. Find a sharp chair, and stab Techno with it. Wilbur too.

Phil looks at Tommy, then at his shoes.

Then at Tommy again, and then at his shoes once more. With a tired sort of sigh.

“You’ve got to be kidding me.”

“Philza Minecraft, I am so sorry.”

Wilbur has his hand over his mouth and is laughing. Techno is turned away and clutching his stomach, Tommy can't tell if he finds it as funny as Wilbur does.

Tommy can't help but smile a little.

It's a little bit funny.

Phil opens his mouth, closes it and sighs. “I liked these shoes too.”

“I will get you new ones.”

“You can’t afford them,” Wilbur and Techno chorus between Wilbur's fits of laughter.

“Shit,” Tommy says, “Philza Minecraft... I am very sorry.”

Phil sighs, “C’mon mate, let’s get you somewhere comfier.”

That’s how Tommy was basically manhandled, and thrown on the couch in the SBI living area part of the tower.

(Floor 69, Wilbur had thought of it apparently which is objectively hilarious and anyone who says differently is wrong. It’s comedic gold at it’s finest and Tommy laughs as they go up in the elevator.)

He’s on the couch.

With a bucket.

Phil has a new pair of shoes.

Phil mumbles under his breath, pacing back and forth. Pausing. Opening his mouth to yell at Techno and Wilbur. Closes his mouth again and continues the never-ending process of Phil trying to find the words to say.

“He needs nutrition,” Techno points out. “If he doesn’t like eggs... chicken is the best thing. That he can eat without vomiting on your shoes.”

Phil stops, and glares at Techno.

Techno withers and looks down at his shoes, muttering something that Tommy doesn't quite hear.

Wilbur passes a glass of water over to Tommy who drinks it, and tightens his grip around the bucket.

He is not going to throw up on Philza Minecraft again. Not ever.

Phil sighs. "It's chicken!"

"It's fine," Tommy says, and Phil looks at him. "I only got the downsides. Chicken is good."

Phil makes a strangled sounding noise, like a cat being kicked. "It's fucking chicken!"

"Have a problem?" Tommy says, and is rudely cut off by him vomiting into the bucket. (Not onto Philza Minecraft's shoes, so he's doing alright in that regard.) He gets his head out of the bucket again and looks at Phil. "Chicken is good. I will continue to eat it."

Phil sounds like he's in legitimate pain. "Fine," Phil says, in a false cheery voice and Tommy... is slightly scared. "Okay. Eat your chicken, you murderer."

Tommy nods slowly, and responds by vomiting into the bucket.

Thankfully, the vomiting slows down eventually. So that Tommy's settled on the couch, holding his bucket, until Wilbur wordlessly takes it from him and goes to put it away.

Techno is sitting on the seat across from Tommy. “You have free food at the cafeteria,” he says and Tommy blinks at him.

“Huh?”

“Free food,” Techno says, and doesn’t quite look at Tommy. “Okay? Get some proper food... here at least. They have salads and rolls and stuff.”

“Right.” Tommy says and nods, “Thank you.”

“Pft,” Techno laughs, “No issue. You don’t weigh enough for a nineteen-year-old.”

“Huh?”

“Your body mass is closer to a fifteen-year-old,” Techno shrugs easily. “Eat more.”

“Oh,” Tommy says and gives a small smile. This one’s going to be fun to try and play off. Thanks Henry. “Henry, the fuckin’ snitch.”

Techno shrugs again, “I get that it can be rough in Logstechire... but it’s very rare for it to be that bad. You’re nineteen, right?”

“Yeah,” Tommy says and his voice cracks. Hopefully Techno thinks it’s because he’s embarrassed, not because he’s scared he’ll sell himself out. “Yeah... I am.”

Tommy may need to burst out into tears again. That is something he can totally do.

Techno tilts his head, and his face doesn’t give anything away.

Tommy looks at him, and shifts under Techno's stare.

"What happened?" Techno asks, "There's something more going on here."

"Doesn't matter."

"Okay."

And they leave it at that, and Tommy has never been as grateful for anyone else in his entire goddamn life. The silence... was heavy, with Techno still glancing at him every few seconds, and Tommy wrapping his arms around his legs and hugging his legs.

The only noise is the news channel, making noise in the back, noise that Tommy isn't quite focusing on.

Tommy blinks away tears from his eyes. He's not crying again.

Techno clears his throat, and Tommy turns so he's looking at him.

"I saw that video," Techno says, "That you edited and shot. It was really good."

"Thanks."

"You were a good hire."

"No one checked that I could fuckin' edit," Tommy muses, "You didn't ask for an application video. Or anything... Wilbur didn't even finish the interview."

Techno just looks at him, “Don’t expect reassurance, I have no clue why you were hired.”

“Cool,” Tommy mutters, “Good to know.”

“I’m pretty sure Wilbur fought for you,” Techno says, like that in itself isn’t absolutely shattering his world. “Phil... wanted to hire someone else, I did too, but Wilbur insisted. Now we have an accident-prone worker who does some good editing work.”

Tommy smiles, it’s a short thing.

And shockingly enough, Techno smiles back.

“Don’t think I still don’t think you’re dodgy,” Techno says, and puts his feet on the coffee table. “There’s something going on with you, Thomas Underscore, and I’m not too attached to you to figure it out.”

Tommy laughs, and shakes his head.

"Techno, you okay?" Phil asks quietly, as if making sure no one else could hear.

And now that he thinks of it, Techno looks quite pale, the kind of pale you get when you see something extremely gross and it makes you sick. Techno just nods at Phil.

“Ugh,” Wilbur says, walking back and shaking water off of his hands. “Why does the news just cover vigilantes now?”

Tommy glances at the TV for the first time, sure enough, it’s the news channel, talking about vigilantes and how they’re becoming more cohesive and the potential that they have to either overthrow the government, or save thousands of peoples lives.

It's not exactly uncommon.

In class Tommy used to argue for, (or against) the ethicality of vigilantes. Of course they did, in a world with heroes, vigilantes and villains, those things were discussed in class.

"Vigilantes are cool," Techno says.

"You're biased."

"I am. You're working without the government restrictions," Techno says, "There aren't as many legal loopholes you need to work around. If you want to make the most change possible, vigilante is the way to go."

"You're a hero," Wilbur deadpans and sits down in the seat next to Techno.

"I also like money," Techno says, "I mean... technically I don't work for the government. I work for Phil, and he works for the government."

"Legal loophole," Wilbur sighs, "Yes, yes, you explain it constantly."

Techno shrugs, (he appears to be doing that a lot) and looks back at the TV.

Tommy does too.

"I hate 'em," Wilbur says, and there's legitimate... disdain in his voice that Tommy decides that Wilbur can never know that Tommy's a vigilante. "I hate them, they're unhinged, dangerous and they don't have any systems in place to keep people safe from them."

“I like them,” Tommy says and Techno looks at him, he doesn’t look surprised as such. More just curious. Wilbur is glaring though. “No one patrols in Logstechire.”

Wilbur looks slightly guilty for a moment. “I’m pretty sure people are picking up patrols in Logstechire. I am tonight at least, I dunno what other people are doing.”

“I have tonight off,” Techno says and sighs gratefully.

And Tommy tries not to think too hard about Wilbur being on patrol in Logstechire tonight.

Like... he really tries not to think about it.

Even when he gets home. He tries not to think about it.

He doesn’t eat his food, (his powers are already severely weakened from eating terribly, he doesn’t need this sort of negativity in his life. It’s better to just not eat at all.)

He tries not to think about it.

When he puts his hood up (and pins it, he’s not any sort of rookie), slowly puts the red tinted goggles on his face and the mask over his mouth. He really, really, tries not to think about it.

Logstechire is known for having vigilantes everywhere, he doesn’t want any of his friends to get captured. Purpled, Slimecicle, Aurelian, he really hopes that they’re okay and don’t get targeted.

As he slips his gloves on and wraps the bandage around his baseball bat. (He only uses it when his powers are exceptionally weak)

He really, really tries not to think about Wilbur (Spectre, they feel like two different people.) Patrolling in his home... ready to arrest him, or any of his friends at a moment's notice.

While trying not to think about it, he's perched on top of a building.

His powers are severely weakened. He can barely lift up a bottle cap. That's the side-effect of bad eating, he supposes, it doesn't end well for him.

Tubbo's voice filters into his ear. "One of our plants is picking up some... interesting things. It's in Kinoko too."

"Kinoko?" Tommy repeats.

Tubbo sighs, "I'll just patch it through."

Some static erupts in his ear, and then Tommy starts to make out some voices. They're grainy... at best and unhearable at worst.

"There's a big fight soon," someone says, and Tommy struggles to make it out. *"They're bringing the oldies back... I'm excited to see it."*

Tommy feels... a quiet sense of dread in his stomach. Great. Great. There's some sort of underground fight, one that he won't be able to quell in time.

"Huh," a new voice says, it's slightly higher and has a different accent. *"How are they gonna get them back? Both of 'em."*

That, is not a good sign.

“No clue,” the first voice says, “No hero is gonna fuckin’ worry about it. Not with those weird ass attacks... the heroes HQ was attacked a couple days ago, ain’t that so weird?”

“Yeah...” the other person says. “That is weird. I hope everyone’s alright.”

“We do not! We don’t support heroes.”

“They have workers there too.”

Tommy sighs, he can’t think of much else to say. Look, these guys don’t appear to be complete assholes.

Then he looks up.

Standing across from him, on the other building is Spectre.

For a glorious moment, he thinks that they’ll just stare at each other.

But then Spectre leaps forwards.

Well... shit.



Chapter End Notes

Computer problem still not solved, but I'm sure it'll be fine in a few days, I'll keep you guys updated :)

-AAuthor

In Which Tommy is Not Having A Good Time

Chapter Notes

WARNINGS: Violence, medical talk, injuries and a good bit of angst for this early on in the fic.

There is a chapter summary at the end!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Yeah... that Spectre.

His outfit was a dead fucking give away. The fucking coat. That he wears like a cape, instead of like anything that's remotely practical in any way, shape or form. The coat is mostly a dark purple, but with patches on it with fabric that seems to shimmer under the moonlight. Combined with the otherwise pitch-black outfit, the ski goggles which have a blueish tint and the fact that he wasn't wearing a mask.

Yup. That's Wilbur.

The smug face and fucking all.

The button holding his coat together, was a little star. Which... while objectively fashionable, would not help Tommy at all. Surely the coat-cape would get in the way? Around his wrists are two golden bands (they're quite big), which are surely arm protection.

Tommy staggers backwards slightly, holding his bat out in front of him like that was going to do anything, or save him from anyone.

That was Wilbur.

He can't fucking hurt Wilbur, he's slightly emotionally attached to him.

Wilbur lands on the building in front of him, and in the dark, Tommy sees Wilbur smile slightly. "There you are, you sly fucker."

Tommy just stares, and walks back a little bit more, trying to keep as much distance between himself and Wilbur as possible.

He didn't want to get hurt.

He didn't want to hurt anyone.

"I'm sorry," Wilbur says, and does not sound sorry in the slightest. "You're gonna have to come with me."

Tommy raises his hands slowly. "No." Is what he signs, and Wilbur squints at him.

"You can't just say no."

He can.

And he will.

Wilbur sighs and adjusts his coat/cape situation. Tilts his head to one side, and smiles again.

He takes a step forwards, and his boots make a noise on the ground. A greyish, blueish colour. Which again, good fashion choice.

But that doesn't help him get out of this fucking situation.

Okay. His powers aren't working.

He has a bat.

He has Tubbo on the line, and knows that Ranboo can extract him in a worse case scenario. He has a panic button for a reason, so he doesn't need to speak to alert Tubbo and Ranboo that he's in trouble.

"Tommy," Tubbo says into his ear. "Are you okay?"

Tommy just hums, being careful not to use his voice. Not while Wilbur is about... twenty metres away, and looks like he's analysing Tommy's every move.

"Someone's there," Tubbo says, and Tommy has never been more grateful that they know each other this well. "Hum when I say the right person. Dream, The Blade, Sapnap, 404, Outwit, Philza, Spectre-"

Tommy hums.

"Okay, finding useful information right now," Tubbo's voice sounds like he's not facing the mic for a moment. "Ranboo, will you be good for an extraction? Okay. Tommy, hit the panic button and you'll be out of there."

Tommy takes a deep breath, and looks at Spectre... Wilbur, whatever, it doesn't matter because he's not fucking being arrested today.

Not when things are going semi-well for him.

Gripping onto the baseball bat, he holds it like he's going to swing... because he might just do that.

"Look, kid," Wilbur says and steps forwards again, the patches on the coat rippling. "You have an easy option, go easily. Or you stay here and fight, I'm personally hoping you go with the second option."

Tommy sighs.

Hopefully his ribs make it out of this one alive.

"It's not that I want to beat you up," Wilbur says, "But it's that I want to beat you up. It would be particularly helpful if you told me where I'd find Purpled, Slimecicle and Aurelian."

Tommy shakes his head.

"Ah well," Wilbur sighs. "I can't say I'm surprised."

"Okay," Tubbo says into his ear, with almost perfect timing. "He's sensitive to light and water. Worse case scenario, you run into a fucking pond. Okay? Maybe spit at him, I don't fucking know."

Tommy sighs, and gets his baseball ready to hit.

Wilbur steps forwards, and breaks into a run.

Tommy responds by swinging, it phases right through Wilbur.

If Tommy had a fucking gun, then this would be so much easier.

Pain shoots through his jaw, and Tommy stumbles back regaining his footing and holding his baseball bat. He swings again, this one hits, and Wilbur yelps, before phasing through, unphasing and lunging at Tommy.

Tommy ducks a punch, swings around Wilbur and manages to latch onto his back.

He hits the ground, having phased through Wilbur.

Throwing his arms up, he stops the attempted kick and makes a noise as the boot slams against his forearms.

“Give up kid,” Wilbur says, as Tommy tries to grab onto Wilbur’s leg and yank him onto the ground. “You’re not going to win... just try to get a lighter sentence at this point.”

Fumbling for his bat, Tommy slams it against Wilbur’s shin and Wilbur yells.

Taking this moment, Tommy rolls away. Eventually stumbling up onto his feet and holding his bat like it’s a sword (at least how he thinks a sword is held... truthfully he has no clue).

Wilbur sighs, like this is somehow inconveniencing him. Rather than... you know, Tommy who’s just been kicked in the forearms and dropped on the ground.

Tommy holds the bat out, and ignores the way that he's shaking like crazy. The bat moving with his shakes too, but Tommy holds his head up high.

Wilbur’s in front of him in a moment, trying his damn best to get a punch landed on Tommy. But he’s ducking, darting, moving out of the way. For someone who’s supposed to be the fourth best hero, Tommy is doing surprisingly well.

He's a bit too close to the edge of the building, but overall he's doing okay.

And then he's being kicked in the chest.

For a moment, he realises he's falling...

Falling off a fucking building.

Because, of course that's his fucking luck.

Throwing out an arm, red shoots out and he's bouncing off the side of the building.

He's in the air for another fear-filled moment.

Throwing out his hands, a red sort of... something forms and he hits that.

Then he's on the ground.

And his fucking ribs.

"Oh, fuck," Tommy says to no one in particular, and prays it's quiet enough.

For a moment he just breathes... nothing hurts. Nothing's pierced at least, small miracles.

His ribs... again. Fucking again?

Tommy manages to get onto his feet, just as Spectre jumps down, feet phasing through the ground ever-so slightly to lessen his fall and then looking at Tommy, a cruel grin on his face.

“Right,” Wilbur says, and his tone is so not like how Tommy knows Wilbur. “So we did it the difficult way, not that I’m complaining. Hopefully your ribs are all busted and you’ll stop fucking fighting me.”

Tommy would not stop fighting.

He was annoying like that.

Tommy slowly grabs his baseball bat and tries to give his best ‘you-wanna-go-bitch’ look and holds his bat up. Ready, and raring to go.

Wilbur sighs, and steps forwards.

Tommy swings the bat, and it hits Wilbur in the guts who makes a noise and swings a fist towards the side of Tommy’s head.

It hits and for a moment Tommy’s vision is slightly blurry, and he forgets where he is.

Until another punch in the nose reminds him of where he is, Tommy scrambles to get some type of protection in front of his face, which ends up being his arms and gets punched several times in the forearms.

He throws a leg out, kicking... something, and Wilbur staggers back.

Tommy goes to move forward.

A foot lands on his chest, and he's kicked against the wall.

He feels something snap, and a cry tears itself out of his throat. It's not voluntary... it just happens.

Wilbur's hands drop down to his sides, and he takes a few steps backwards. He puts his hands up in the air slowly and takes a few more tentative steps back.

Tommy slams the panic button on his side. It beeps once, and he hits it again.

Clutching at his ribs, he takes a deep breath-

Ow. Fuck. That hurts.

Something's pierced.

Something... his lung.

Pierced... probably with a part of his ribs.

That Wilbur just...

Tommy looks up at Wilbur and clutches at his ribs, breathing too much hurts, it sends a wave of blistering pain through him, pain that makes his legs feel like noodles and his head spin as he breathes.

Well... fuck.

Somehow he's panting to breathe, despite the pain.

Is he getting enough oxygen?

His chest seems to be tightening in on itself. He can't get enough air, this is how he's going to die, in a dingy alley after being kicked off a roof by his employer. Which, while it is a hilarious story, doesn't feel quite so funny right now.

"You need to breathe," Wilbur says, taking a few steps forwards and Tommy flinches back against the wall without meaning to. He pauses where he's standing, and keeps his hands where Tommy can see them. "You need to breathe, take off your mask, it'll help you breathe better."

Tommy wants to scream.

Wilbur takes a few more steps forward... careful steps, like he's some sort of scared animal. "Okay? You need to breathe kid."

Tommy slides down against the wall, clutching at his ribs, trying to transfer some of the pain away.

The pain that's making his head spin, breathing hurt and making a silent rage brew up inside of Tommy.

Wilbur did this.

Wilbur the person who a couple of days ago he'd saved.

The person who helped him while he was sick... today, did this.

Wilbur takes a few more steps forward.

Tommy grips his baseball bat, and tries to make it look casual.

He's right in front of Tommy, and reaching out for his mask-

Tommy hooks his foot, and pulls.

Wilbur hits the ground.

With some difficulty, Tommy pulls himself up and points the baseball bat at Wilbur's throat. Like it's a sword, instead of a fucking baseball bat.

Tommy finds himself wishing it was a sword.

He hopes this gets the message across.

Raising the baseball bat above his head, he looks at Wilbur. He can't see his eyes, because of the ski goggles, but he hopes that Wilbur's scared.

He swings the baseball bat down-

And stops.

Just before he can actually hit Wilbur, he stops.

Tommy takes a few steps back, trying not to breathe too much.

Wilbur seems to get the message, and considering that both of them are breathing heavily. Tommy would say that they're both about as scared as each other.

"Stay away," Tommy signs, and hopes that Wilbur knows sign language. "Okay? Stay away from me."

Wilbur, nods slowly, and gets to his feet. He puts his hands up in the air, and walks so he's still facing Tommy as he backs out of the alleyway.

Then he's gone.

And Tommy can breathe again... not literally, his ribs and lungs hurt, and he's pretty sure they're actually going to have to see a doctor for this one. It hurts.

His head spins, and his chest aches.

Where's Ranboo?

He's supposed to be here right now?

Gripping onto his chest, he settles down on the ground. Leaning his head against the wall, and trying to take deep breaths, even if it hurts his chest and he wants to scream out in agony every time he does so.

Ow. Ow. Ow.

There's a zwoop and Ranboo is standing in front of him, his eyes concerned and crouching down so he's at eye-level with Tommy.

"Are you okay?"

"Ribs," Tommy manages, wincing and trying to hold his breath as much as possible as pain shoots through his ribs. "I might've pierced my lung."

Ranboo's eyes shoot wide, "We need to go to a hospital."

"Don't have insurance."

"Don't care," Ranboo shot back, and looks a bit helpless in what to do with his hands. He opens them, closes them and mutters something under his breath that Tommy can't be bothered to try and focus on. "Pierced lungs are very bad Tommy."

"Might not even be pierced," Tommy tries, closing his eyes to stop tears from shooting to his eyes. "We can't afford it."

"We'll manage," Ranboo says.

"It was Wilbur," Tommy groans, and hisses as his ribs seem to croak and groan under the pressure of breathing. "He's gonna know, if I rock up at a hospital, with no alibi. With an injury that he just gave to a vigilante."

"We lie," Ranboo says, "Hopefully they won't even know. We say it was a different time, and we took you home because we thought you were alright."

Tommy nods slowly.

“Where’s your earpiece?” Ranboo asks, and looks at both of Tommy’s ears.

“Dunno. Must’ve broken.”

“Okay,” Ranboo says, and pulls out his phone. He presses a few buttons and there’s a dialling sound. “Yeah, Tubbo. Hey, it’s me... how’s he looking? Not great, he thinks his lung got pierced and his breathing is all rattly... no, I’m not letting you yell at Tommy right now. Later, perhaps.”

Tommy screws his eyes shut tighter, and hugs his arms around his lower ribs as much as he can. It fucking hurts, it hurts so fucking much. He can’t focus on much else, apart from the stabbing sensation and how he wants to burst out into tears and start bawling.

Wilbur did this.

And Tommy was going to do the same thing back to Wilbur, as some sick form of revenge.

He was going to hurt Wilbur.

He was going to hurt Wilbur.

Tears slip to the corners of his eyes, and fall. He doesn’t open his eyes, but he feels Ranboo’s gaze on him.

Adrenaline crashes... yup, Tommy is definitely having one of those.

He overused his already weak powers.

Yeah... he’s not staying awake much longer.

“He really doesn’t look good Tubbo,” Ranboo says, “Really... Tommy, Tommy. Stay awake. Tommy!”

“Need a nap,” Tommy manages.

The next time he opens his eyes... two things are different.

One, he’s in bed. Two, there’s golden light shining on his face. Three, Tubbo is in his face.

Tommy screams, but instead of pushing Tubbo away, he wraps his arms around Tubbo’s neck and hugs him. “Tubbo! Hi!”

“Tommy!” Tubbo says and is grinning, but there is something slightly maniacal in his eyes. Cool. “We’re gonna guilt trip Wilbur!”

“Huh?” Tommy asks, “What happened?”

“Partially collapsed lung,” Ranboo explains, he’s sitting on a chair across from the bed. Legs crossed, and looking slightly too big for the chair. It’s impressive that he fits. “It wasn’t that bad apparently. Simple pneumothorax... didn’t need surgery or anything.”

“A small tear,” Tubbo adds. “You won’t even be here that long. One to two weeks!”

“Wait,” Tommy says, a few terrible realisations dawning on him. “We don’t have medical insurance.”

“Ah,” Ranboo sighs, and Tommy looks at him. “So... they wanted contact with your employer... and, they got a hold of Kristin and then Kristin got a hold of Phil and now... we’re here.”

“Oh shit,” Tommy says. “Wait, what does that mean?”

“We’re guilt tripping Wilbur,” Tubbo grins, “Ranboo said I couldn’t hit him with a chair, so... we’re guilt tripping him.”

“Oh.” Tommy says, and blinks a few times. “That’s... vaguely unethical.”

Tubbo shrugs, and much to Tommy’s surprise, Ranboo does too. Tommy looks between the both of them, normally Ranboo doesn’t give into his ideas so easily. It must not have been great.

Tommy sighs, “Two weeks.”

“Or maybe just one,” Ranboo adds, a little unhelpfully. “I mean... it could be longer. At least it’s not fully collapsed, that’s a couple days in bed.”

“Right.” Tommy runs a hand down his face.

“Also.” Ranboo says, and Tommy looks up. “Uh... there’s sorta a video, of Wilbur kicking you off the building.”

Tommy looks at Ranboo, a million thoughts bouncing around in his head. “Huh?”

“It means,” Ranboo says, and he’s grinning, so it’s bad. “One, you have a PR nightmare to deal with and two, you’ve been given a vigilante name. Apparently that’s the best way to get named... get kicked off a building.”

“Oh no,” Tommy says, “What is it?”

Tubbo laughs, “Theseus.”

Silence.

Which stretches for a moment longer than it needs to.

“Fuckin’ Theseus?” Tommy says, his voice oddly calm. “Theseus fucking dies! He gets yeeted off a cliff!”

Tubbo raises his eyebrows.

Ranboo snickers into his hand.

“Oh.” Tommy says, “Okay... that makes sense. But fuckin’ Theseus, that’s such a shit name! People get... The Blade, Philza, Spectre, fuckin’ Outwit? And I get Theseus? It’s not even original, it’s stolen from mythology!”

Ranboo sighs.

Tubbo is nodding and jumping up and down on his feet. “Yup! Plagiarism! Your name was stolen from some old ass stories.”

Tommy buries his head in his hands.

There’s a knock on the door.

It opens slowly.

Tubbo starts glaring, and Ranboo rolls his eyes... but he sure doesn't look happy either.

It's Philza Minecraft, the man himself. And... Ranboo looks pretty shell shocked, considering he's blinking rapidly.

"Philza?" Ranboo says, "Holy moly. Okay then."

Tubbo's mouth is open. "Philza Minecraft? Who is quite old?"

"Uh... hi mate," Phil gives an awkward wave, and Tommy returns it.

"Tommy!" Tubbo yells, "Philza Minecraft came here for you."

Tommy sighs. He's been doing a lot of that recently.

The door swings open, and Techno walks in. Behind him was Wilbur, and Tommy would love to pretend that his heart didn't jump and one of his fists tightened, ready for a fight.

"-a building?" Techno was saying, "Hey Tommy."

"Hi."

"A building?" He repeats, and sighs.

“Hi, Tommy,” Wilbur says, and sounds dejected... like he’d just beaten up a literal child. Oh wait. He had. “How are you?”

“Great,” Tommy deadpans, “Apart from about to be crippling broke-”

“You have insurance,” Techno says, “It’s being set up right now.”

“Worse case, I pay,” Wilbur grumbles, and sits down on the floor. Oh, he’s upset that he kicked someone off a roof, wait until he hears about how upset about this Tommy is.

Tommy nods, and tries not to think about how much he’s itching to hit Wilbur with a goddamn baseball bat. If he had the means, or the motivation to... then Wilbur should be fucking scared.

“I get mugged, wake up,” Tommy starts, “And there’s a media nightmare.”

Wilbur winces. “Yup.”

“You kicked a vigilante off a roof.”

“I did.”

“How the fuck are we supposed to spin that?” Tommy asks, and throws his arms up in the air. “Let me guess... he’s being cancelled on Twitter?”

“It’s been trending number one for... six hours,” Techno adds and Wilbur pouts even more.

Tommy sighs, and runs a hand through his hair.

The irony of this situation isn't lost on him.

His job is to make Wilbur (the person who kicked him off a roof) look good and justified in having kicked him off a roof. Which is a very ironic experience that he's hoping to just ignore until it goes away. (Fingers crossed.)

"Tubbo, Ranboo," Phil says, and Ranboo still looks like he's still in shock. "We need to talk about some things... insurance things."

"Wait, what?" Tommy looks between Phil and his best friends. "This is my insurance. Tell me."

"It isn't," Techno adds and has taken the chair that Ranboo was in. He's sitting in it like he owns the fucking place which... he's rich enough to own the place. "It's about if the insurance covers them."

"Woah." Tubbo looks... like he's having a dream. "Talking to Philza Minecraft about insurance, what has our life come to?"

"No clue," Ranboo mutters and follows after Phil.

That leaves Techno and Wilbur, and Tommy.

"How are you?" Tommy asks and Wilbur laughs, it's not a happy laugh, but it's a laugh nonetheless.

Techno snorts, "The irony of that. Tommy, you were mugged and got a collapsed lung."

"Did someone tell you that?"

Techno gestured to the clipboard hanging at the end of the bed. “I can read.”

Wilbur moves slightly, and he’s looking at the clipboard too. “What is that fucking handwriting?”

“Doctors,” Techno adds. “It’s easy enough once you learn how they write.”

“Why the fuck did you learn how doctors write?”

Techno shrugs.

Tommy leans back onto his bed, and looks up at the ceiling.

Now, he has two choices.

One, guilt-trip Wilbur. The pros of that choice were that it would make Tommy feel better about being kicked off a roof by Wilbur. The cons are that he’d feel worse for going to hit Wilbur with a baseball bat.

Two, don’t do that.

Tommy keeps his eyes on the ceiling, as Wilbur’s and Techno’s chatter filters around him. He doesn’t focus in at any point, instead focusing on the ceiling and mulling over his actions.

“Tommy?” Wilbur asks, and his voice is concerned.

He wants to hit Wilbur with a bat.

“Weren’t you supposed to be patrolling?” Tommy’s voice is small. “You said you were going to patrol Logstechire.”

The silence is telling.

Techno whistles.

Tommy’s eyes snap to Techno and he glares at him.

“Tommy-” Wilbur starts.

“Where were you?” Tommy asks, and his voice has found strength. “Because I’ve just seen footage of you kicking someone off a roof, instead of... y’know, actually looking after people who needed your help.”

Wilbur is silent.

“This is why people trust vigilantes more!” Tommy yells. “They don’t kick people off of buildings and they stop muggings from happening.”

“Tommy-” Wilbur tries again.

“I hope you’re happy,” Tommy crosses his arms and slinks down in his bed. “I’m sure as fuck not.”

“I’m sorry,” Wilbur says, and looks apologetic, for what that’s worth. “Really... I am, but vigilantes are dangerous.”

“So are muggers!” Tommy yells and runs a hand through his hair, “A vigilante would’ve actually helped me.”

The silence after that... yup, that’s pretty telling.

Even Techno seems at a loss for words.

“I kept hoping that you’d show up,” Tommy says, and it’s not even that much of a lie. He’d been hoping that the Wilbur he knew would show up, rather than... fucking kick him off a building. “You said you’d be patrolling.”

“Theseus did it,” Wilbur blurts out, and everyone stares at him for a long moment.

“Fuckin’ what?” Tommy says, “Did fucking, Theseus, drag you away from the streets and go ‘please kick me off a roof Spectre?’ Or did you chase after your own self interests and now people are suffering because of it?”

Techno pulls a face, “If you can’t hit him with a chair, I can.”

“Thank you,” Tommy glares at Wilbur who wilts under his stare.

Everyone is silent.

Wilbur opens his mouth, closes it and sighs.

Tommy turns over in his bed, it’s nothing apart from an action to try and spite Wilbur. He’s more facing Techno now, Techno... who looks awkward to say the least.

“Look, Tommy, I’m sorry.”

“Oh well,” Tommy is still facing away from Wilbur, “In that case. You can pay for these damn hospital bills.”

“I will.”

“Wait, what?”

“Insurance isn’t set up yet,” Wilbur says, “For you... someone has to pay, that someone will be me.”

“Oh... thanks.”

Everyone stays quiet.

The door creaks open, and Phil’s head pops in.

“Phil!” Wilbur groans, “Tommy yelled at me.”

“I think he’s justified, mate,” Phil says.

“This is why we’re eating the rich,” Tommy mutters, “Bye, bye Wilbur, when the revolution kicks off I’m going to hit you with a bat.”

Wilbur falls silent, and Tommy would be mad about the slip-up if it wasn’t mostly true.

Techno takes a deep breath, like he’s been stewing over some thoughts for a while and is ready to let them spill.

Tommy, for one, is excited to watch Techno yell at Wilbur.

"You're seriously going to let your personal vendetta against vigilantes ruin people's lives?" Techno stares at Wilbur, face almost completely stoic apart from a simmering anger.

Wilbur stays quiet, avoiding eye contact with his brother, he looks angry, but mostly, guilty. They don't speak for a moment.

"You're a hero, right, Wilbur?" Techno asks, waiting for Wilbur to nod shamefully before finishing "Then fucking act like it."

"Techno, that's enough." Phil states, crossed arms and eyebrows furrowed.

"And you!" Techno points at Phil "You're defending him!"

"You know exactly what happened last time we trusted a vigilante!"

"I'm not saying to fucking trust him!" Techno says, "Or befriend him, or get over that unresolved trauma that you obviously need resolved! I'm saying to not kick a literal child off a roof, and leave other people in need because you're so blinded by your past that you can't see that not everyone is gonna-" he pauses and takes a deep breath. "You're both being irrational. Letting your emotions control you, think of it logically, people like vigilantes, they wouldn't if they weren't likeable."

Phil and Wilbur are silent.

Techno stands up from his chair. "I'm sick of your crackdown on vigilantes! It's difficult to become a hero, you need a personal connection, most people don't have that. For all intents and purposes, I shouldn't be a hero, but you excuse that I was a vigilante for years because... why?"

“You were a, what?” Tommy says.

“You’re biased, but only when it suits you,” Techno finishes.

Phil sighs. “Techno... you’re not going to arrest Theseus, are you?”

“No.”

“You’re not going to befriend him, are you?”

“No,” Techno has a little less conviction this time.

Overall... today has been a weird day.

Techno huffs, pushes past Wilbur and Phil with a bit of a shove and walks out.

Damn. Okay then.

Techno really just left him with two people who have just been yelled at, in no way could this go wrong.

Ranboo and Tubbo replace Techno who just left, “Is everything alright?” Tubbo asks, “Techno looked mad, what did you do?” Tubbo looks at everyone, and his eyes settle on Wilbur. “What did you do?”

Tommy sighs.

Wilbur splutters for a moment. "We're gonna..." Wilbur gestures at the door, "Everything's paid for, okay?"

Wilbur looks at Phil.

"Phil, can I talk to you? In private." Wilbur asks quietly.

Phil nods and they leave the room. Tubbo and Ranboo sit awkwardly by his bed, clearly all three of them would try to eavesdrop.

And maybe Wilbur didn't want to be that private, seeing as they could hear them, slightly muffled and quiet sure, but they were still audible.

"Phil- I'm- fuck, I don't know how to say this-"

"Calm down, Wil, just say it when you're ready-" the rest is muffled beyond anyone being able to make it out.

"It's just- Theseus, he just- he sounded so much like Tommy when he screamed."

The three teenagers freeze, and Tommy didn't know about his roommates, but he feels as if he just got dunked on with a bucket of cold water.

He couldn't know. Could he?

Tubbo looks at Tommy, and he starts moving towards the door, apparently ready to try to take on two heroes at once. Which... while it is a sweet sentiment, Tubbo is gonna get his ass kicked.

Phil says something but it's too muffled for any of them to understand.

"He's a kid. He's probably Tommy's age and I just- I hurt him." Wilbur sounds panicked now
"I just can't get it out of my head! Every time I think of it, I see Tommy in Theseus's place
and I just-" he sounds choked up, like he was about to cry "Fuck!"

Everyone looks at each other.

Surely, surely Wilbur doesn't know. It sounds like he doesn't know... like he's just nervous.

"I think we're good," Ranboo whispers. "Let's hope we are anyway."

"They're too dense," Tubbo whispers back, as they hear two pairs of footsteps get further and further away.

Tommy... is straight up not having a good time.

Techno:



Chapter End Notes

IT'S ANGST TIME MOTHERFUCKERS

-AAuthor

uh... it's not that bad... yet

- Ellis

Summary:

Tommy and Wilbur fight on a rooftop, Tommy gets kicked off the roof and eventually kicked into a wall. There he hurts his lungs, and Tommy, fueled by rage, goes to hurt Wilbur back, but stops himself. Ranboo comes to rescue after Tommy hits his “panic button” and Tommy passes out from power over-use and his adrenaline crashing.

He wakes up in hospital, and discovers there's footage of him being kicked off a roof by Wilbur, and has been dubbed 'Theseus' he is not impressed, that's for sure. Then he discovers that Wilbur has caused a PR nightmare for himself.

Phil, Techno & Wilbur rock up. (Ranboo and Tubbo fangirl over Phil.) And Phil, Ranboo and Tubbo leave the room to talk about insurance. Tommy is like “weren’t you on patrol wilbur?” And Wilbur is in his sad boi arc. This gets escalated to an argument, which is essentially Tommy & Techno vs. Wilbur.

They argue a bit more, and Techno goes OFF at them before storming out. Wilbur and Phil leave shortly after, and have a “private” conversation, in which Wilbur says Theseus and Tommy sounded similar and that he sees Tommy in Theseus’ place every time he thinks of it. They then leave and Tommy... straight up is not having a good time.

That Time That Techno Had A Nightmare

Chapter Notes

HEY ALL!

WARNINGS: blood, medical talk, needles, nightmares, panic attacks, guns (a very, very brief mention). Please be careful y'all. The potentially triggering part is the nightmare, otherwise... it's fairly fluffy.

There is a chapter summary at the end!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

technoprotect, technoprotect, blood, blood, one of us!, E, /rainbowchat

Techno swore, putting his hands on either side of his head and pushing as hard as he could. Until his arms were shaking.

“Get out, get out,” he mutters, shaking his head and pushing as hard as he could. “Get out! We’re not in danger!”

Blood, blood, we want blood.

“Well I want a fucking doughnut! We don’t all get what we want.”

Blood.

“No! I just yelled at someone, I’m not fighting any of them!”

Fight them.

Technocoward, technowuss, THESEUS POG, E

He sits down, on the pavement. It must be a weird sight, him sitting on the side of the footpath. Pushing both hands against his head, like he's trying to crush his brain... which... isn't completely off from the truth.

Number two hero. Sitting on the pavement. Wishing to rip his head off.

Yup, that's realistic.

*Blood, blood, blood, blood, for the blood god, kill, kill, murder, stab, stab, kill them all,
/rainbowchat, E, blood, blood, blood, give us blood!*

Honestly, he yells at someone once and now the annoying voices in the back of his head are screeching, screaming, crying for... something.

This is why he needs to stay apathetic through life.

A hand lands on his shoulder, and Techno twists the wrist that the arm belongs to. Before pausing, and looking at who had tried to grab his shoulder.

Phil.

Techno lets go, and glares at Phil. "Where's Wilbur?"

"In the car," Phil adds and looks over his shoulder. "Apparently there's been another attack, Wilbur and I are going to check it out. Just look around, the threat's been dealt with."

“Who by?”

“Dream and Outwit,” Phil said and Techno nodded slowly. “You can sit this one out, you know that, right? Last night was supposed to be your day off.”

“Yeah...” Techno ran a hand down his face.

Phil! Dadza, craft a damn belt. Phil! Phil! Phil! Protect. Dadza.

Techno relaxed slightly, at the voices and their adoration of Phil.

“Thank you,” Techno muttered, “I think... I think I’m gonna walk back to my apartment.”

Phil nods and pat Techno on the shoulder. “Call us if you need anything, okay?”

“Will do.”

“I will craft a belt, if you don’t,” Phil says and Techno snorts. “Okay. Be careful, don’t get mugged.”

Some underlying worry was there, and plenty of unspoken things went under that.

“The media will be tough on you as well,” Phil says, concern in his eyes. “Okay, tell us if you need anything?”

“I will,” Techno deadpans, and Phil nods and moves his hands away from his shoulder and walks towards the car.

Phil had asked if he was going to befriend Theseus... that wasn't exactly a lie, he wasn't going to befriend Theseus, ideally they were going to team up.

Techno was a lot of things, he'd been called a lot of things in his life. It was just the sad truth of his life. He was paranoid, he was violent, he was apathetic and emotionally constipated and needed a bucket load of therapy that he didn't have the time or energy to attend.

But Techno was one thing, and he was that for sure.

He was someone who did his research.

Theseus wasn't a new vigilante, he just hadn't been named up until now. He had a couple of names before this (Red Chaos, Incommodus Redcharge. There seems to be a bit of a pattern here.)

All of those names didn't stick... but Theseus (for some reason) seemed to stick. Techno had to guess it had something to do with being kicked off a building. Which while is objectively hilarious.

But by researching all of the previous names, he found some interesting details.

Details that he got incredibly easily, details that no one else would be looking at because everyone else he worked with would never try and find this information. It wasn't that surprising. He worked with people who laughed like kettles.

Theseus (or Red Charge as he was called in one of the early articles) mentioned busting an underground fighting ring, it was in passing mention and Techno had stared at the article for a long moment.

Otherwise... Theseus, (or whatever he went by) seemed like someone who Techno could respect. Busting underground fighting rings, and other situations was an incredibly endearing thing to do.

So. Techno was planning on finding him.

He grabbed his earphones out of his pocket and started walking.

Alright. Two weird attacks now, there was something that needed to be analysed there, he just wasn't quite sure how to analyse them yet. But still, he looked down at his phone and walked.

Techno sighed, walking the distance to his apartment.

Ah... media.

Crowding his apartment.

Maybe he could get someone to hit him with a chair. In the head, and hurt him terribly badly, so he didn't have to deal with this.

Someone spots him and everyone turns arounds and fires cameras at him.

Techno... sighs.

He can probably blame it all on Theseus.

"Techno Blade," some reporter says and Techno sighs in anticipation. "What do you think about the Theseus situation?"

"I don't know," Techno says, and gets through some of the people. "I'm yet to find out all the facts."

“Will this help solidify that many people have no trust in heroes?”

“If it means early retirement... I hope so.”

“Early retirement?” Another reporter says, “Do you resent your job?”

Techno sighs, and pushes past someone, a bit rougher than he should. But he thinks the media will forgive him for this one. This one... at least.

“I resent the reporters crowding my house, please cancel me on Twitter, I would love nothing more.”

Ah yes, another thing to discuss with his non-existent therapist.

Therapy pog.

His mind supplies and Techno mutters an assortment of swear words before pushing through some people, and finally making it into the foyer of the apartment. It was empty, due to several laws that essentially protected Techno’s house, and any superhero’s house from reporters.

It was fun.

Sometimes he regretted living in Logestchire.

Sure, it wasn’t as stuffy as Upper L’Manburg, but it meant it was easy for him to get swamped by reporters. As he was the only hero who lived in Logestchire (to everyone’s knowledge), it meant... Well, let’s just say he was more than willing to hit someone with a chair.

His apartment block wasn't dingy by any means (Phil hadn't let him get the one he wanted, with a broken stair and plumbing that didn't work.) It was one of the better ones.

Swinging open the door, he stumbles in, tripping slightly over his own two feet and throwing his phone across the room onto the couch.

His apartment... yeah, it isn't dirty or grimey, it wasn't the best. It had some gross carpet in his bedroom, but that had been mostly covered up by a rug and sure, there might've been a weird stain in the bathroom. But that was fine.

It wasn't too big, two bedrooms (mostly for when Wilbur would pass out here) and had a great bathroom for throwing up in. The couch was... Phil's old one that he insisted on throwing out, and Techno had stolen it.

Look... he didn't need a lot of things to make him happy.

Flopping onto the couch he looks up at the roof, the voices were leaving him alone (the joys of having a resting heartbeat and he glances at the TV.

There was a knock on the door.

"It's open!" Techno yells.

There were the pittering footsteps on the ground, and some slightly more human ones.

"Floof!" Techno exclaims, sitting up as the tiny dog runs at him. He leapt up, and Techno caught Floof in his arms and hugged the tiny dog. "Hello!"

He looks up, and Niki is leaning in the doorway and smiling. "Hello, Techno."

Niki, one of the sweetest people that Techno has ever met. Someone who happens to be his neighbour, in this semi-dingy apartment and one of the few other people he trusts with Floof. (Apart from his family.)

She also was the only reason Techno ate anything mildly nutritious, and the reason why Techno's hair wasn't a spotty mess of pink and looked alright.

At the same time, Techno was the reason for about a good three-quarters of her fighting ability and the reason that Niki had learnt to use a sword.

"Niki," Techno hugs Floof a bit tighter, "Good to see you. Thanks for taking care of Floof."

"No problem," Niki says, walking forwards and sitting on the couch like she owned the place. Which... she was probably in his apartment as much as Floof and Techno were. "He was very polite today."

"Nope!" Techno puts Floof down, who yaps happily and goes off to do... something. "Floof is an attack dog."

"He attacks flies," Niki deadpans, and brushes some hair away from her face. It's a darker pink than his, and shorter. "I don't think he's much of an attack dog."

"Mhmm," Techno looks at Floof, who is currently trying to get his entire mouth around a drink bottle, and Floof is... struggling to say the least. "Look at him, he's deadly. Dangerous, armed to the teeth."

"Mhmm," Niki muses, and stifles a laugh. "He's not a service dog."

"Nope." Techno manages as Floof looks up at him and yaps. "An attack dog."

Niki walks over to Floof, who looks at her, with the judgement that only a tiny, fluffy white dog could manage and pet him. He seemed pretty content with that, and rolled over onto his stomach which Niki scratched.

“He’s simply deadly,” Techno says and Niki laughs, throwing her head back and stops petting Floof to cover her mouth with her hand. “Lethal, one might say.”

Niki laughs, rolls her eyes.

The rest of the afternoon went along easily, with Niki and himself bullying Floof (only a little bit... his legs were just so unapologetically tiny and he deserved a little bit of bullying for it). And that Floof would only eat his food off the floor.

Dogs were weird.

People were weird too though, so Techno could excuse it.

“Hey Techno,” Niki says, cutting him off from what he had to say about mythology. Which was an odd thing for Niki to do, so Techno closes his mouth, and looks at Niki.

“Yeah?”

“What do you think of vigilantes...”

“They’re cool,” Techno says, petting Floof who was curled up on his lap. “Hopefully they mean I retire sooner.”

Niki smiles, nods and looks at the TV. She nods again, glances at Techno, smiles and looks back at the TV. “That means a lot.”

“I know.”

And they call it an unspoken conversation for a reason.

Niki left. Floof yapped at the door for an hour afterwards.

“Am I not good enough?” He asks the dog.

Floof looks at him, looks at the door and keeps yapping.

“Cool,” he mutters, “Thanks, Floof.”

The rest of the day passed easily, and Techno was in bed at a good reasonable time. He’d brushed his teeth, showered, ignored several texts from Wilbur and Phil and instead watched TV.

His prosthetic is resting on the bedside table, which makes Floof pause at it and bark a few times in curiosity.

Techno picks Floof up and puts him on the bed.

“It’s my leg,” Techno deadpans and rolls over, as Floof scrambles over his body to get to the other side. “You’ve seen it before.”

Floof barks happily.

Techno rolls his eyes. “Don’t chew this one up, alright? I’m trusting you, this is one I actually need.”

Floof tilts his head at him, his best shot at puppy-dog eyes which don't work on Techno anymore. After seeing Floof chew up one of his legs... yeah, puppy-dog eyes didn't work after that.

"No eatin' my leg," Techno says, "Wake me up if anyone breaks in. Alright?"

Floof yaps, spins around in a circle and settles down on the bed.

"Okay. Night."

And Techno closes his eyes.

He's in complete darkness, something holding his hands together tightly and he can hear faint cheering.

Light blinds him for a split second, and he winces, turning his head away slightly before looking up at... familiar yet slightly off arena in front of him.

The cheering is louder.

It screams in his ears, and hurts his brain.

Pain bursts through his leg and now he's on the floor, he hears screaming and it takes him a moment to realize it's him.

His hands are holding onto something wet and sticky when he looks down the only thing he sees is blood.

Blood?

His blood?

His lower leg is completely crushed, he can't feel it, but it hurts.

It hurts.

He wants Phil.

He looks back up.

He's strapped to a medical bed, tubes with what he knows are some sort of drug attached to him.

Pins and needles prick his skin and his leg feels a throbbing pain on his leg.

He screams.

Hopefully someone will hear him, please let someone hear him.

Where's Phil?

Where's Wilbur?

They said this wouldn't happen again, they promised him that this wouldn't happen again-

He screams again. Immediately he gets slapped in the face and suddenly it's silent.

He's completely alone in the medical room, he can feel the drugs burning through his veins , they feel like fire, he can feel them twisting and manipulating his veins, changing his blood composition.

He can feel it all... they never bothered with painkillers when it suited him.

The cold metal attached to his leg, he feels it, chilling him down to his bone.

He closes his eyes tightly breathing rapid.

It'll be okay.

It'll be okay-

It has to be okay-

A bark wakes him up.

He shoots up, panting, desperately trying to get any air into his lungs. Floof is in front of him, sitting there, politely, and he can't breathe.

Techno manages a laugh, it's shaky, and barely a laugh as Floof looks up at him.

“Hospitals, huh?” Techno manages, between desperately trying to breathe, the urge to cry and the panic rising in his chest. “Yeah. Makes sense.”

Floof doesn't say anything, he's a dog, but he curls up into Techno's lap, and Techno runs one hand through his fur, while his other hand fumbles for his phone.

He finds it, after knocking several things to the floor.

He needs to breathe.

In and out.

He clutches his phone, until his hand's shaking.

His vision is blurry.

Floof looks up at him.

Techno busies his hands with petting Floof, he can call someone later, right now he needs to calm down.

He needs to calm down the racing in his heart.

Floof yaps at him, it's gentle, and he's thankful for that.

He has no clue how long he stays there, petting Floof, as his heart calms down and he starts being able to control his breathing.

Picking his phone up off the bed, he looks at his contacts.

There are three, three that he actually talks to anyway. Niki, Wilbur and Phil. He has more contacts, but most of them stay untouched, save for the odd birthday wish. Those three are the only people he speaks to outside of work, he never has really liked people much.

His finger hovers over Phil's contact for a moment.

Then he clicks on Wilbur's before he can let himself regret it.

It rings a few times.

"Tech?" Wilbur's sleepy voice comes through the phone, "Why are you up?" Although it's said considerably more slurred. "You alright?"

"I think so," is what Techno decides on. It isn't a lie, but he doesn't feel like it's much of the truth either. "Just had a... really bad dream."

"Oh shit," Wilbur says, and sounds a lot more awake. "Hospitals... Tech I am so sorry-"

"I thought I'd be okay," Techno tucks his phone against his shoulder, and sighs slightly. He's tired.

"Do you need us to do anything?" There's the sounds of sheets rustling on Wilbur's end. "I can come over, or you can come over here. I don't mind."

"Aren't we fighting?"

"Doesn't matter, fights get put on hold for things that actually matter," he says it easily, like it came without thinking and that does something to Techno's poor emotions. "You're my brother, even if you say we're not. Do you need me to stay over?"

Techno's mind short-circuits.

Between somewhere between that first and second sentence, his brain stopped processing exactly what Wilbur was saying, and just felt... safe for a moment.

"Can you?"

"Of fucking course," Wilbur says, and he hears some noises which sound a suspicious amount like a grappling hook being taken off the wall. "I'll be there in... two minutes, unless I die."

"Cool."

"See you soon."

Techno hangs up first, and his hands find Floof's fur again.

Everything is fine.

One minutes and fifty two seconds later, there's a bang against the window. The noise of the window opening, Wilbur's footsteps stumbling in. Hitting the box that he always hit, several seconds of muffled swearing and then Techno's door swinging open.

He had a complete idiot of a brother. He did this every time.

"Hello!" Wilbur says, almost looking like more of a mess than Techno probably did. "Oh. You look awful."

“Everso insightful, Wilbur,” Techno says, and there’s a hint of amusement in his voice. But not too much, he can’t let Wilbur get too big for his boots. He’s a fucking nerd, that’s what he is. “Thanks.”

Wilbur jumps onto Techno’s bed, over Floof and himself and bounces slightly on the other side.

“Are you sleeping here?”

“Where else would I be sleeping?”

“I dunno,” Techno adds, “The bed I have in the spare room... literally set up for you.”

“Nah,” Wilbur crinkles up his nose. “You have the better bed.”

“I literally don’t! I’m gonna swap ‘em at this rate, your old bed is in that room.”

Wilbur sits up, and looks at Techno. “I threw that out.”

“You thought you threw it out, between you and Phil you get enough new furniture to furnish entire apartment blocks.”

“That’s a joke,” Wilbur says, his voice clearly uncertain. “Right?”

“No. Most of it I donate to charity.”

Wilbur pales, and sinks down so he’s lying on a pillow. “Oh.”

“Eat the rich,” Techno mutters, unenthusiastically and Wilbur snorts at that.

“You say like you don’t benefit.”

“I get legs,” Techno deadpans, and picks up his prosthetic from the side table, before hitting Wilbur with it a couple times. “Unlike you, I don’t need to mooch off of Phil.”

“He’s a millionaire! He would be a billionaire if he didn’t meet you and you didn’t go on rants about how unethical billionaires are.”

“I stand by that statement.”

Wilbur sighs, and lets himself get hit in the torso with Techno’s leg.

“Billionaires are unethical Wilbur, there is no reason one person needs that much money.”

“I mean yeah.”

Techno puts his leg back down on the bedside table, and pointedly ignores that there were a lot more things on the bedside table when he went to bed than the amount that was currently on the table.

“One day I’ll radicalise you.”

Wilbur sighs, and runs a hand down his face.

They’re both quiet for a moment, as Wilbur shuffles so that he’s under the blankets.

Techno huffs and Wilbur laughs.

“If it is like the sleepovers we used to have,” Techno starts and Wilbur laughs at that. “Then I will kick you out.”

“What do you mean? We used to get so much sleep.”

“When?”

“When we were supposed to be at school.”

“When you were supposed to be at school.”

“Ah,” Wilbur waves a hand. “Right, tragic backstory got you out of school.”

Techno raises an eyebrow and looks at his brother, hopefully looking more judgemental than he felt. “Ah yes, because you didn’t take months off of school after your tragic backstory started.”

Wilbur glares.

Techno glares back.

Then they both burst out into laughter.

Apparently that’s funny enough that Wilbur starts kicking his legs and cackling like his life depended on it. Which was both endearing and very loud, and Techno covers his ears as Wilbur scream-laughs.

He missed this.

It felt like they were dumb teenagers again, laughing and stifling to make sure that Phil didn't eventually ban them to each of their own rooms.

(Techno was pretty sure Phil knew about the impromptu sleepovers.)

Wilbur's laughter died down.

"Are we gonna talk about the fight?"

"You used unnecessary force."

"I did."

"We think Theseus is a kid."

"We do."

"You used unnecessary force on a child."

"Yup," Wilbur manages, and Techno glances at him. His eyes were screwed shut tight, like he was attempting to avoid tears. "I know, and I'm sorry."

Techno shakes his head, "No use apologising to me."

“Yeah...”

“Okay,” Techno says.

“That’s it?” Wilbur asks.

“That’s it.”

“Just like that?”

“Just like that.”

Wilbur flops so that he’s lying down again, his eyes settled on the roof above them and Techno does the same, eyes settling on a weird stain on the ceiling which Techno knew better than to question.

“It’s fairly easy to get along with you.”

“I’m forgiving.”

“You’re something alright.”

“Go to sleep, Wilbur.”

“Okay then Technoblade.”

“I hate you.”

“Night.”

Techno rolls his eyes, turns over and closes his eyes.

He wakes up to the smell of something being cooked. Which was weird... considering that he wasn't at Phil's place, or even Wilbur's.

For a moment his brain catches up, and Techno blinks at the roof. Then he looks for Floof.

The traitor left him for Wilbur.

A quiet pitter-patter of Floof's paws confirms that and Techno groans and manages to get himself free from the blankets and reach for his prosthetic leg, which he put on with a little bit of a struggle.

“Damn... leg,” he spits out, eventually managing to get it on and getting up onto his feet. He adjusts for a moment, before walking out into the kitchen.

Wilbur is at his oven... making food.

Techno goes through the seven stages of grief (even though there are five, he made up two new ones). And picks Floof up from the floor, and holds him away from where Wilbur is cooking.

Or attempting to cook, if Techno knows anything about Wilbur.

“Wilbur. Step away from the stove.”

Wilbur glances up, and shows his phone. Which has Phil on it.

“Hey, Techno!”

“Phil! You’re allowing him to cook?”

“Relax,” Phil says, pulling on that ugly bucket hat that must be... years old at this point, Wilbur had given it to Phil before Techno had known them. Which... wasn’t a short amount of time. “I’m coming over as soon as possible. If we tag team this, your kitchen can survive.”

“Wilbur, let me take over,” Techno begs, more than willing to push Wilbur out of the way.

“Wilbur. Move now.”

Wilbur smiles.

“Nope,” Techno rushes forwards, yanking Wilbur off the ground, and throwing Wilbur over the counter and onto the couch.

He looks at the eggs, and takes over, glaring at Wilbur who is glaring back at him.

“You’re banned from my kitchen.”

“Your pans are my old pans!” Wilbur yells, “I threw those out!”

“No, you thought you threw them out,” Techno glances at the cupboard he’s standing in front of. He doesn’t want to break it that most of his things in this house actually belonged to Wilbur, Phil or even Niki at some point.

Look, Niki has good kitchen supplies, and got them for some of Techno's birthdays. Phil and Wilbur were just wasteful, and Techno didn't like spending money. All in all, it was a pretty good win for him.

Wilbur opens his mouth, and goes to get up off of the couch.

Techno shakes his head, and Wilbur sits back down and pouts. "You don't even have enhanced strength, what the fuck?"

"Some of us do strength training."

"I do agility training," Wilbur argues, but it's weak at best. "Sometimes..."

Techno glances up from the fry pan, and gives Wilbur his most judgemental look. "You go to training as often as you get me birthday presents."

"That was one time!"

"How many times have I forgotten your birthday?"

"None," he grumbles. "Technically I didn't forget, I just forgot that I promised to get you something."

"You didn't get me anything."

"You're someone who hoards my old stuff!"

“Only the useful stuff!”

“Don’t you have a box filled with stuff from when you were a teenager?”

Techno glares, and points the spatula at Wilbur. Wilbur puts his hands in the air in a mock-surrender and sighs.

“Watch TV, Bake Off should be on by now.”

“You watch the most old person TV of anyone I’ve ever met.”

“And I am happier than you with my life.”

“That’s completely objective-”

“Subjective,” Techno cuts in. “Subjective means opinion. Objective is fact. And you can’t speak English effectively.”

“Fuck off,” Wilbur waves the remote and Floof settles onto the couch and leans against Wilbur’s leg. “You haven’t had a maths class in your life.”

“But I’m still smarter than you,” Techno shoots back easily, and Wilbur pulls a face.

Wilbur opens his mouth, closes his mouth and opens it again, “You don’t even have a tax file number, you just use mine.”

“You also get paid my wage,” Techno replies, and keeps scrambling the eggs. He starts serving three plates, just as there’s a knock on the door. “Get the door.”

“You’re closer.”

“I’m making breakfast.”

“Techno,” Wilbur whines and Techno responds by flipping him off.

Wilbur groans, but gets up from off the couch and stomps over to the door, giving Techno a harsh look.

Phil walks in, waves and sits down at the breakfast bar.

Techno slides over a plate of eggs to Phil.

“Wait,” Techno says.

Phil is looking him dead in the eyes. “Am I a joke to you?”

Techno opens his mouth, closes it again and slowly takes the plate back. “Um...”

“Am I a joke?” Phil repeats, “You’re feeding me eggs! First Tommy and KFC, and now this?”

So Phil’s quickly given some toast, to avoid Techno being stabbed.

And they’re all settled, Floof is darting around trying to eat everything off of people’s plates, which is never a great idea. Which leads to Techno eating with his plate basically held above his head, as Floof yaps at him.

“Go away,” Techno mutters, “Phil, Wil, how was that attack thing you went to?”

Wilbur groans.

Phil sighs, “Barely nothin’ just like the attack at the tower... only one of them had a gun, and they were disarmed by a civilian.”

Techno hums.

“Nowhere near as impressive as Tommy’s disarmament,” Wilbur adds. “Tommy... who is always hurt. Phil, have we looked into his roommates?”

“Yeah,” Phil says, taking another bite out of his toast, “They’re good. I looked at their records, and spoke to them. They both care about him, you can just tell.”

“Right,” Wilbur nods, “So nothing... he sounds like Theseus.”

“No work talk at home,” Techno says.

“You live in an apartment,” Wilbur deadpans.

“You’re a shit head.”

“I’d call it more of a shithole,” Phil adds.

“Oh my God,” Techno groans, “You and your classism, this place is fine. You’re both just rich. Not all of us need a penthouse. I can assure you, people have worse places”

Wilbur shudders, “Tommy’s...” he shakes his head. “What were half of those stains?”

“You didn’t touch them,” Techno’s head shoots up from looking at his eggs. “Right? Wilbur, tell me you didn’t touch any mysterious stains.”

“I don’t think so.”

“Good,” he sighs. “Thank the heavens.”

Wilbur huffs, rolls his eyes and goes back to eating the eggs, even as Phil side-eyes him.

Techno focuses on his eggs.

Tommy and Theseus... it was an interesting situation. One that Techno isn’t going to think too hard about, certainly not while Wilbur and Phil were here, maybe afterwards.

Floof yapped, and Techno turns around.

“You good?”

Floof nods.

“Do you mind?”

He headbutts Phil's leg.

Techno turns back around, and shovels the last of the egg into his mouth. "Did we get sent our roster?" He grabs his phone and opens the website. "Should this be public information... our rosters."

"Legally has to be," Wilbur adds and waves a hand. "I think you're rostered on for patrol tonight... no clue about much else though."

Techno sits up a little straighter.

Phil gives Techno a look, sometimes Techno forgets just how well that Phil knows him.

"Do not try to find Theseus," he says sternly.

Techno just shrugs back.

He's pretty sure that they've already found him.





Chapter End Notes

Those memes are a threat and a promise.

The name Red Chaos comes from this fic:

<https://archiveofourown.org/works/30646853/chapters/75611561>

and Redcharge comes from this fic:

<https://archiveofourown.org/works/31642559/chapters/78306584>

(read them both, they're sooooo good)

Chapter Summary:

Techno walks home from the hospital, and thinks about Theseus from the research he did. The media is swarming his apartment block, he makes his iconic sarcastic remarks before getting past them and going home. Niki (his neighbour and friend) shows up with his service dog named Floof. They talk for a bit.

Techno goes to bed, takes off his prosthetic leg and ignores messages from Phil and Wilbur before going to sleep. He has a nightmare, and wakes up pretty shaken and calls Wilbur. They talk and Wilbur agrees to stay the night with Techno.

Wilbur rocks up, they talk. Wilbur agrees that what he did to Theseus wasn't right and apologises to Techno. They keep talking for a bit, before they both go to sleep. Techno wakes up, Phil also shows up while breakfast is being made and they talk about some of

the attacks that have been going on. Work rosters, and Techno is banned from finding Theseus. Techno however... has some suspicions.

In Which Tommy and Purpled Team Up (and things go perfect.)

Chapter Notes

WARNINGS: blood, guns, kidnapping (implied), violence

Please be careful! As always there will be a chapter summary at the end!

Also! Huge shout out to [Kero](#), who helped me (Ellis) with Purpled's characterisation so much. I could not have written him this chapter without your help, and discovered the absolute joys of writing Purpled!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The thing about being in hospital is that it's incredibly boring. There was so many times that Tommy could scroll through Twitter, and watch Wilbur get absolutely dragged on the internet.

That led to the foundation of a Theseus... Twitter page, he's slightly ashamed of it. But not enough that he's going to cry about it or anything. (Plus the username @theseusiguess is hilarious.)

Ranboo and Tubbo are gone a lot.

Two weeks.

One week in, and Tommy is already done. All the checks have lined up, but Wilbur's paying and Wilbur says 'you're not going back to work for two weeks.'

So Tommy is bored out of his mind.

He's tried counting.

He's tried getting apps on his phone.

He once tried actually doing something.

To no avail.

All he can think about. Is those men in Kinoko... what they were talking about.

An underground fighting ring.

Tommy is familiar with them, he has no choice but to be familiar with them.

"There's a big fight soon. They're bringing the oldies back... I'm excited to see it."

"Huh? How are they gonna get them back? Both of 'em."

It's repeating in his head as the days go past.

As Tubbo and Ranboo duck in and out whenever they can, and as SBI (Salty Bitches Inc) leave him alone and he's completely fine with that and not at all hurt by this—

Okay, if he's a little bit hurt then nobody needs to know that.

So on the eleventh day, when his ribs are no longer aching and the doctors say that he's essentially fine.

He discharges himself.

Sure, he's not going to go back to work for another three days. But he has things to do.

Sure, Ranboo's going to kill him and Tubbo's going to pretend that he's also upset (but then buy Tommy some snacks for them to share when Ranboo's passed out on the couch, and they're watching... whatever movie they're watching.) And is the Salty Bitches Incorporated also going to stab him?

Probably.

But he's stopped listening to them after one of them kicked him off a roof.

After eleven entire days of being bored, and a few days of being healed.

He's outside of the hospital.

Discharged, and free from being terribly bored.

He has his phone tucked against his shoulder, and the familiar ring is echoing through the phone.

"Tommy?"

"Purpled."

“What the fuck d’ya want?” He asks through the phone. There’s the sound of slightly muffled violence in the background. “Weren’t you jus’ kicked off a building?”

“Eleven days ago,” Tommy sighs, “Get up with the news.”

There’s the sound of something landing on the wall behind Purpled. Purpled muttering something that the phone won’t pick up.

Tommy taps his foot against the ground, arms crossed, waiting for Purpled to finally be done with whatever the fuck he’s doing. Knowing Purpled... it involves him getting money and beating people up.

Truly, an amazing vigilante.

“Give me a second,” Purpled says.

Tommy waits.

There’s the sound of more muffled violence, and people and things being thrown. Glass breaks, someone yelps out in pain, Purpled grunts and something that sounds suspiciously like a stool breaks in half... probably over someone’s head.

Someone else screams, and more glass breaks, punching, kicking and there’s the noise of bones breaking slightly. (Fractured probably, knowing Purpled.) Another cry, and then it all goes silent.

A few muffled footsteps and the rustle of fabric.

“Yup?” Purpled says, “Don’t worry... police and paramedics have been called. No one’s dead... yet. What do you want?”

“I need info.”

“Oh,” Purpled says, “You really care so much about me. But yeah, what about?”

“Not on the phone.”

“Oh?” Purpled says, “Ew... unconscious person.”

Tommy nods. “Where can I meet you?”

“I’m literally right in the middle of something.”

“Something with sketchy ethics?”

“Nope, assholes messed with kids... messing up genes and powers and stuff.”

“Ah,” Tommy mutters, “Can I join?”

“Yup. Get your costume, I’ll see you, normal meeting spot, in ten minutes.”

“Aye, aye,” Tommy says.

Purpled hangs up first (like always) and Tommy shoves his phone into his pocket. Grabbing the bag that Tubbo and Ranboo had brought for him... just filled with things he needed.

Ranboo and Tubbo are going to kill him, but for some reason he thinks it's going to be worth it and they're probably going to sympathise with him.

The walk to the apartment is a short walk, (luckily). He clambers up the slightly broken stairs and opens the door. It's unlocked, because anything worth keeping goes with them to work or school. Or it's in the safe.

The safe that only Ranboo is trusted with. (Tommy's, Philza merch from when he was fourteen is in there.) Which is hilariously wholesome, and one day when Tommy figures out how to get that safe open, he's going to wear that merch into the office.

Which is hilarious to him.

Tommy gets the costume on.

The gloves, which leave his fingers free, because he's never enjoyed having his fingers covered. The hoodie, where the lining and the edges of the pockets are red, so are the strings that hang in front of him.

It's similar on his pants, with small accents of red in an otherwise very black outfit. Including the black turtle neck he wears underneath, and the boots which also had small splashes of red on them.

Around his belt, wasn't much honestly. His baseball bat that could fold out, a taser (courtesy of Purpled for his birthday), zip ties, duct tape and a universal key (mostly for unlocking any handcuffs put on him... and you never knew who used a universal lock.)

Tommy pulls his mask up, over his nose and mouth, and then pushes his goggles up on his eyes. Pinning his hood is never a difficult thing, it just took a couple of moments.

Trusty grappling hook in hand, he zips out of the window. Landing on the roof across from his apartment and taking a few steps, stumbling forward and adjusting for a moment.

It felt amazing, his power was dancing in his veins. Pulling, twisting, he felt the most alive he had in years. It screams in the best way possible, and everything just felt right for the first time in a while.

He flicks his wrist and a burst of red energy bursts out in front of him. It's more powerful than it normally is.

Tommy feels like he could take on all the top heroes at once.

The running across the buildings is liberating, bouncing off the top of them, letting his powers bounce him a little further than he needed to go. Flying through the air and landing on the roofs, panting slightly before flying forwards again.

He lands next to the water tower on top of one of the apartments. Feet slamming against the floor, and taking a moment to catch his breath.

Sure enough, Purpled slid down from the water tower. Landing in front of Tommy with his arms crossed, a slightly bloody staff in his hands.

Purpled... basically just wears purple. It's a purple hoodie. His mask isn't on his face, but it's a black mask (same make and brand as Tommy's actually), except, the googles are sewed to the mask, which keeps the mask and the goggles in place better.

Tommy's debating to do the same thing, it's a smart idea and from what he's heard from Purpled. It's way more secure that way.

For the intellect that Purpled has in mask choice, he does not have the same intellect in gloves choice.

Because his knuckles are split open.

Tommy rolls his eyes. “You should wear gloves... ‘specially if you’re punchin’.”

Purpled huffs, and waves a hand. “Okay then, *vigilante*. ”

“You’re literally a vigilante too, just on the opposite spectrum.”

With another hand wave, Purpled turns around and looks out on the city. “So... what do you want to know?”

“One of the bugs that Tubbo planted. Overheard a conversation from some Kinoko guys... about a... new fight, and getting a bunch of old guys in.”

Purpled sits up slightly, an odd expression on his face. “I- haven’t heard much about that. Just that’ll happen... I haven’t heard anything else either.”

Tommy nods, leaning against the side of the water tower.

“Context clues,” Purpled mutters, and Tommy knows him well enough to know that Purple is judging, looking at everything and analysing patterns, how Tommy’s moving, the quickest way to incapacitate him. Anything and everything. Purpled is... somehow more paranoid than Ranboo.

He still doesn’t know if it’s one of Purpled habits, or if he does it on purpose.

“Underground fighting rings,” Purpled sighs, “Some people who potentially escaped, or have been off the scene and training for a while. Problem is we won’t find records of any of those people, no matter how much we try. Unless you go through missing kids.”

Tommy nods.

“Even then. Technically I’m a missing kid and,” Purpled gestures between the two of them. “I’m not in a fighting ring, neither are you.”

“Legally I’m not missing. All my records say I’m nineteen.”

“Ah,” Purpled hums, and stands next to Tommy, also leaning slightly against the water tower behind them. “Wanna bust a fighting ring with me?”

“I want nothing more.”

Which is how Tommy ends up, crouched on a roof. Purpled next to him, while he toyed around with some screen that he pulled out of... somewhere, probably just a pocket, but it was still weird.

It just looked like an average apartment block, but Tommy knew that those were the places that they wanted them to be. People who were dumber would say that families lived here, which while true, most people knew about what was going on in the basements.

The rent’s cheap.

That was all people care about.

Tommy knows the feeling.

Purpled glances up, eyes on the building.

“Two ways in. One, civilians, we take off the costumes and stuff it somewhere. Two, all guns blazing,” his voice is slightly deeper and echoey than it would be otherwise. The joys of voice modulators.

“No killing.” Tommy says, grabbing his baseball bat from his side, shaking it so it extended.
“Okay?”

“If they bleed out before people get there. I’m not gonna try to stop the bleeding.”

“Okay, no,” Tommy glares at the side of Purpled’s face, he’s pulled up the mask so it was over his eyes and mouth. “I’ll let you break as many bones as you won’t, but we can’t let anyone bleed up.”

“Deal,” he says.

They shake on it, and Purpled sighs.

Purpled passes the screen over to Tommy. “Blueprints of the apartment block say that we have to go in through the main foyer. Someone there will have a key... and a gun, we know how these places work. Knock out the guy with a gun, get to the... labs. If there’s anyone there, we get them out.”

“First priority,” Tommy confirms.

Which is code for *‘Tommy gets them out’* and *‘Purpled beats the shit out of anyone that tries to get in their way.’* He wouldn’t have it any other way either.

Tommy grabs his grappling hook, and Purpled glares slightly.

“Come on man,” Tommy says, “Grab on, just like when we were little.”

“We didn’t know each other until we were fourteen,” Purpled deadpans, and reluctantly grabbed a hold.

They zipped over the short distance. Swinging slightly and slamming into the building.

“Ow.”

“Fuck off.”

They drop to the ground, and Tommy holds his bat.

They pause for a moment, mentally preparing themselves outside of the door.

Purpled kicks open the door, and pulls out... a gun.

Okay. They're doing it this way then.

Tommy gives Purpled a look. “Don’t shoot anyone,” and Purpled sighs, rolls his eyes and steps forward.

People start screaming.

Purpled rolls his eyes, Tommy can’t help but cross his arms.

“Okay,” Purpled sighs, not even pointing the gun at anyone. Instead he waved it around as he spoke, like one would a drink bottle or any other object that couldn’t kill someone, “I reckon all of you have been robbed before, same concept. On the ground, don’t want your stuff, want the key to-”

Tommy points at the door he knows it’s through.

All places like this are the same. Thick door, which one person has the key to, to unlock the entire thing.

Purpled sighs again... he sounds more tired than anything.

“Someone hand over that key...” Purpled says, eyes darting around the foyer. Where some people are silently crying. He’s obviously looking for guilt, or some body language.

Tommy starts scanning the room.

Purpled is doing the same thing.

Tommy nudges Purpled and he glances at the same person.

Ah yes, that makes sense. The timid type, the one that just wants to be liked by others above all else. Purpled nodded, and walked up to the guy, placing the gun against his temple and holding it steady.

Tommy glances at Purpled.

Okay. If Purpled shoots anyone, Tommy is going to have some words.

“Alright, buddy,” Purpled says, with amusement in his voice and Tommy feels just a little bit unsettled by the whole thing. “You’re going to give us the key, alright? We know that there are enhanced individuals being held in the basements and we know that you have either a keycard or a key to get us down there.”

The man shakes slightly, and Purpled groans.

“We get it, you’re terrified. Give us the key.”

With a shaking hand, he reaches into his pocket and hands a keycard to Tommy. Tommy holds it in his palm for a moment, inspecting it, before nodding slightly and looking at Purpled.

Purpled snatches it off of Tommy and examines it for a moment.

Humming he moves the gun away and nods.

“Is that Theseus?” Someone asks and Tommy winces.

Purpled laughs, “Your vigilante name is *Theseus*? Wait, wait, what?”

Tommy glares. He can’t talk as Theseus, it’s kinda half of his branding... so instead he glares through his goggles and hopes that Purpled knows that Tommy resents him right now.

“You have got to tell me this story,” Purpled laughs and then looks at everyone still on the ground shaking. “Uh... stay here, please? Don’t call the heroes, shit, they’re going to call the heroes. Please don’t?”

Effective persuasive techniques. Purpled, the master of words.

Tommy rolls his eyes, and gestures at the door. They kind of have a job to do.

Purpled sighs, shoves at Tommy and walks towards the door.

It doesn't unlock.

"How do you unlock this?" Purpled asks, "Like where's the keycard reader. Am I stupid?"

Tommy nods.

Purpled flips him off, "This is not going well."

It normally doesn't go great anyway, at least this time they haven't been shot at.

Yet.

"The handle," the man from earlier rasps out, "Tap it on the handle."

Purpled taps it on the handle. The door beeps and swings open.

Tommy steps in first, bat at the ready.

"Please don't call the heroes!" Purpled yells over his shoulder. "Or do actually, I wanna see if I can take them."

The door closes behind them, and the cramped stairwell becomes pitch black straight away. Purpled sighs and brings out a screen, the artificial blue light the only thing leading the way as they sneak down the stairs.

Sneak is a strong word, considering how many times Tommy almost falls over.

The staircase levels out into a long hallway, and Tommy's grip on his bat tightens as they take a couple of steps.

At the end of the hallway, there's dim red light.

Purpled's breath catches in his throat, Tommy can hear it. Tommy feels much the same way, like there's rocks in the pit of his stomach and a silent sort of terror brewing in there.

No matter how many of these places they raid, Tommy will always feel slightly sickened by it.

Tommy steels himself, ignoring how his hands are shaking and steps out of the hallway into the main room.

There are cages.

Cages basked in red light. The room is just... cages stacked up with a door ahead of them, where a different colour of light is coming from under the door. A bright white light. Tommy glances at the cages again.

Fucking... cages?

He wants to throw up.

Purpled is behind him, their backs are together.

Enough of raiding these places means they know that people come out of the dark and tackle them. Tommy watches, waiting for any movement in the darkness.

This area is cages. All of which are empty.

It's too quiet down here.

Purpled seems to realise it at the same time, "This isn't... normal."

"No," Tommy keeps his voice quiet, as he starts walking around.

One of the walls has claw marks on it. Tommy tries not to think about the bloodstain against some of the walls and the other dark stains on the floor, ones that look a lot like splatters of blood.

Overall, he feels sick.

Purpled hums, almost robotically. "This isn't right," Purpled says, "Something's up here."

"Maybe it's one of the main ones," Tommy says slowly, poking his bat at the door and nothing happens.

"Not enough security," Purpled says and Tommy can't help but agree. "Nowhere near enough. This was... too easy."

Tommy takes a step back from the door.

"What are the chances that the guy with the keycard is in the foyer?" Purpled's thinking now, and that's dangerous, because it means Tommy starts thinking and nothing good has ever come from Tommy's thoughts.

"We didn't lock the door behind us," Tommy says.

“Shit!” Purpled yells.

They hear footsteps and in an instant the two of them are pushing the cages up against the door.

Purpled’s bending one of the cages, one of the looser bits of wire and wrapping it around the door handle. As Tommy rubs his hands together, a small red spark darts off of his hands and onto the floor.

Right, in the worst case scenario, he essentially breaks the door knob.

There’s someone pounding on the door, and Purpled scrambles back, tripping over.

Tommy drags him up and he fumbles for the keycard, tapping it against the door handle.

That door opens, and they essentially fall through.

Closing the door behind them, Purpled taps the keycard again and a light on the door flashes red for a moment.

They both stand against the door for a moment, trying to catch their breath.

“Oh shit,” Tommy mutters.

“Yeah,” Purpled manages, “Yeah... that’s accurate.”

Tommy sighs, standing up slightly now.

This room is... filled with papers, desks and whatever else.

There are three desks, all of which are empty. No one's at them, computers are on the ground, shattered across the floor like they were hit with a hammer and screens are smashed.

He walks forwards towards one of the desks.

Purpled hangs behind.

The desk is covered in papers, all of which Tommy decides that he's pocketing and shoves them in the huge pocket that spans the inside of his hoodie (it's a sneaky pocket, what can he say, it's good for food, snacks and holding secret documents.)

Tommy sits down on the chair, before putting his feet up on the desk.

"Tommy." Purpled deadpans, "Don't do that."

Tommy flips him off, and settles, leaning back in his chair slightly. "Look for computers."

Purpled gestures at the computer parts smashed on the ground.

"Nope," Tommy says, "We need a harddrive that's intact."

"Why?"

"Information," Tommy shuffles through some papers. They're tax forms. And they're empty. The assholes didn't even pay anything in taxes. "Paper is great... but not many people use

them. We need something.”

Purpled again, gestures at the computer parts on the ground. “It appears these are the computers.”

“There’s a laptop,” Tommy adds, and Purpled pulls a face under his mask (Tommy can sense it.) “You can look, I’m reading.”

With a sigh, Purpled goes over to the other desks and starts looking in drawers.

Tommy sighs at the paper on the desk, there’s quite a lot and he’s not sure what’s going to be relevant and what isn’t going to be relevant. Half of him wants to get a backpack and start cramming stuff in there, and the other half of him says a backpack will be an easy target.

“Do you reckon they called the heroes?” Purpled asks, head halfway in a draw.

Tommy puts down a printed out email.

“Yeah,” Tommy says slowly, eyes settled on the piece of paper in his hands.

It reads... *Ranboo* .

Tommy knew, he knew about all of this. He knew about Tubbo and Ranboo, he knew about the shithole they’d been through. He knew all of this, he’d heard the stories, and the nightmares and the panic attacks.

His hands shook, and he slowly put the paper down, not willing himself to read anymore than what he had already read. It was... a privacy invasion.

He didn't need in depth records from the people that hurt Ranboo to tell him anything.

Then he folded the paper, and shoved it into the pocket on his jacket too.

"Found it!" Purpled exclaims, holding up a laptop. "It was... under the water dispenser."

Tommy snorts, trying to get rid of the shaking that he was feeling and that his mind was screaming at him about this. This one, this one was the place where Ranboo had been and Tubbo had worked.

This was the place.

Fuck, they had records of Ranboo here, and Tubbo was probably somewhere in the piles of paper. Records, that if got out... would potentially be disastrous for anyone who had a record here.

Leaking powers never went well... especially the powers of ex-ring fighters. It had happened once, someone's record from when they were in the ring were leaked and it had gone... just horribly wrong, very quickly.

Tommy took a deep breath. "We need to burn these records."

"Huh?"

"The heroes have been called, you and I both know it. We can't let them get their hands on these records, they'll either try to recruit people, put them in jail or they could get leaked and their powers could get exploited."

Purpled pauses before nodding a few times. "Someone you know in those?"

“Yup,” Tommy forces out, sounding almost as choked up as he felt. “We’re setting these on fire, and taking the laptop.”

Purpled nods, and walks over, handing the laptop to Tommy.

“I’ll light the fire,” Purpled says, and it’s said easily, as if that didn’t mean the world to Tommy. “Don’t get sappy on me, collect the papers.”

So they did, they collected the papers and watched them go up in flames. (A fire lit by a lighter that Purpled had on him for some reason) and they both watched until the last pieces of paper were bits of ash on the ground.

After a moment, Purpled straightens up and turns to one of the doors.

He takes a deep breath, and kicks at the door.

The door flies open and Tommy has his bat at the ready, and Purpled has his gun at the ready.

They both stare.

In red paint, on the wall, there’s a message.

Too late. Nice try.

With a spade painted under it... like a card spade.

Tommy stares at the message for a long moment.

Something wells up inside his gut, something ugly and cold. It freezes the blood in his veins and at the same time makes him boil all over and he closes his hands, he opens them and closes them again.

Purpled says something, but Tommy doesn't hear it.

Tommy glares, he feels his power rising up, before it has any outbursts.

He should get control.

He doesn't want to.

Armed with better sleep and food than he's had in weeks... and his powers being stronger than usual.

His powers explode.

Purpled tackles him to the ground, and Tommy just registers to hold the laptop to his chest so it doesn't break.

Something crumbles around them, and Tommy doesn't have many other thoughts than to throw a shield up and that something shatters and someone screams. That might be him though.

The world settles around them, and Tommy looks up, the shield of red energy falling apart around the two of them.

Both sat up.

There was a huge chunk blown out of the wall, revealing the sky.

“Shit,” Tommy mutters, “I-”

“What the fuck?” Purpled screeches. “Tommy!”

“Don’t say that so loudly!” Tommy screeches back.

“You fucking blew up half a building!”

“It’s one wall!” Tommy defends, although it’s not the best defense. “Fuck it. We’re going.”

Purpled nods, and the pair of them look at the hole blown in the roof of the basement. It leads outside, hence the sunlight beaming down on them.

A figure stood against the sky and Tommy looked up, holding his arm up to try and shield his goggled eyes from the sun.

Ah. Techno.

The Blade, peering down into a half destroyed basement.

“Well,” Techno says, in the voice that he used all the time. It wasn’t a fake voice like Wilbur, it was more like how Purpled’s voice just stayed the exact same. “Do I get an explanation?”

“Uh.” Purpled says, “Hey.”

“Hello,” Techno jumps down, landing in front of the two of them. He’s in his superhero gear, with the pig-skull mask, pink hair out. A red cape (which didn’t look practical) a white poet's shirt, boots and black pants. “Purpled... Theseus.”

“You know us?” Purpled says, “Uh... hello.”

“Hello,” Techno says, “We just established that.”

“Don’t arrest us,” Purpled stumbles out, hand floating over the gun that Tommy knew was strapped to his side. “I’ll have to fight you, and I dunno how well that would go.”

Techno sighs, “Does Theseus talk?”

“Uh...” Purpled looks at Tommy, then at Techno. “He’s more of the quiet type.”

Tommy wants to laugh at the irony.

“I know sign,” Tommy signs out, and Techno straightens up slightly at that. Wait, Techno knows sign language? *“I can hear,”* he signs out, *“Just don’t talk much.”*

“That’s alright.” Techno signs back.

Tommy feels like passing out.

Okay then. Techno knows sign.

It’s not that he doesn’t know anyone else who knows sign language. Tubbo and Ranboo were the ones who taught him, but no one that he’s worked with as Theseus (well he wasn’t Theseus at the time) knew sign language.

He trusts Purpled with his identity, some tough spots lead to that. Some tough spots before he knew Tubbo and Ranboo, so of course he trusts Purpled with his identity. Purpled trusts him with his.

But... Aurelian, Slimecicle, neither of them know sign language. Which made things difficult for the few times that he actually did team up with either it had been him playing charades.

This made him emotional... for not much of a good reason. Someone who was about to arrest him knew sign language. Great.

First Wilbur, now Techno. In the span of a eleven days, not even a fortnight.

“Oh,” Techno looks up. “I’m not gonna arrest either of you two. We have Phil...” he pauses, apparently slipping into how he normally speaks, then freezing, “Philza, because they thought it was a hostage situation.”

“Oh shit,” Purpled says, eyes wide. “I mean... it kinda was, but that was my fault.”

Tommy rolls his eyes under his mask, and flips off Purpled.

“Just... get outta here,” Techno adjusts his mask slightly and glances over his shoulder. “Theseus... right?”

Tommy nods, trying to not feel too faint.

He gestures at the laptop. “Do you have a guy who can get into that?”

Tommy nods, and holds the laptop to his chest

“That’s alright,” Techno puts his hands up and takes a step back. “I’d just like to know what’s in there, when you figure it out.”

Wait, what?

“*Talk later?*” Techno signs and Tommy nods because he doesn’t know what else to do. “Okay, go now,” there’s the noise of something hitting the ground and feathers rustling. “Seriously, I can’t save you both from Phil.”

Tommy nods, and grabs a hold of Purpled, powers pulsing through his veins as he pushes off the ground, propelling himself into the air and Purpled screams as they go soaring.

They hit the ground and Purpled grunts.

There’s the sound of wings and muffled talking.

The pair of them slide behind a dumpster, before sitting against the ground and waiting for everything to calm down.

It’s a while, and neither of them dare to speak.

Cars drive off, wings rustle and they’re finally good.

Standing up, Tommy shuffles out from behind the dumpster.

And promptly jumps as seeing Techno and slams his head on the side of the dumpster.

“Woah, woah, woah,” Techno has his hands in the air again, “Theseus.”

Purpled shuffles and sighs, before jumping on top of the dumpster and crouching. “You’re kinda sus, *Blade* .”

Techno shrugs and looks at Tommy, who is still holding the laptop to his chest. “Just... stay safe, don’t get caught, y’know. I know you have people who care about you, don’t get caught. You either Purpled.”

“Why do you know who we are?” Purpled asks, moving so he’s sitting on top of the dumpster and his legs dangle off the side of the bin. “What do you want?”

“Everyone seems to forget I was a vigilante before I was a hero, even my own family,” he muses and Tommy (again feels like passing out, what is happening in his life?). Techno laughs again and it sounds slightly weird. “Look, don’t die, you don’t have many heroes on your side but you have enough that if you’re smart, you’re gonna be fine.”

Tommy nods.

Techno goes to walk off, he pauses and looks over his shoulder. “See you Purpled, see ya later Theseus. If you ever wanna raid another place like this, just let me know.”

Purpled sighs, “Yeah, play that mysterious helpful act, you prick!” And flips him off.

Techno doesn’t even turn around, and flips him off right back.

Tommy... just sighs. Today has been a long day.

He starts off, deciding now is the time to get home.

When he got home, exhausted and going to need a nap. Ranboo and Tubbo yell at him for leaving the hospital.

Tommy responds by taking a deep breath, and putting both the laptop and the file that mentioned Ranboo on it. He slides them across the table, looking down at his hands as he does so.

Ranboo's eyes widen and he slaps one hand over his mouth. With his other hand, he reaches out towards the piece of paper, which he picks up.

Tubbo's hands dart to the laptop, which he picks up and held it in his hands. Ranboo takes a deep breath, and throws the paper back on the ground and shakes his head. Tommy sighs, looking down at the floor.

"Purpled and I went to go and try get some people out. I think they got everyone out before we got there. I found these... and burnt the rest of the files," Tommy sighs, and looks up at Ranboo. "Are you okay, Ranboo?"

Ranboo shakes his head, and Tommy just pulls a soft face, before smiling at Ranboo.

"C'mon 'ere big man," Tommy says, his voice is all soft, he doesn't let it be that way often.

And he flings his arms around Ranboo, who buries his face into his shoulder. He doesn't cry, Ranboo doesn't cry much, he has a limited amount of scars to prove it. But he buries his face into Tommy's shoulder, and sobs.

The sort of sobs that didn't need tears, ones that Ranboo had mastered.

"It's okay," Tommy whispers, heart breaking at his friend. "It's okay Ranboo."

Tubbo joins the hug, because of course he does, because Tubbo is chaotic and loud and just like Tommy. But also like Tommy, he cares for his friends. They hug Ranboo, and if Tubbo also starts crying too, Tommy doesn't say anything, apart from shuffle slightly so that he's hugging his other best friend as well.



Chapter End Notes

Chapter Summary:

Tommy gets bored so leaves the hospital (after making a Theseus Twitter account) and calls Purpled about something he heard in Kinoko just before Wilbur attacked him.

(“There’s a big fight soon. They’re bringing the oldies back... I’m excited to see it.”

“Huh. How are they gonna get them back? Both of ‘em.”

Purpled says he has no clue, however he does have an ex-fighting ring holding place to bust. Which they attempt to do, they run into some slight trouble and get unsettled at the things that are inside. They find a laptop which Tommy believes to have important information on it. Then they go to leave, and there’s a message on the wall that says “Too late. Nice try.” With a spade (like the cards).

Tommy gets mad and powers go BOOM! And destroys half the basement. Techno shows up, is polite and tells them to get outta there before Phil shows up. Which they do. Techno & Tommy talk again (and Purpled is there too) about a possible team-up.

HELLO ALL! It is I, Ellis! I have finally been giving posting permission... so nice to see you all (normally A-Author will edit and then post these, but... I know more about HTML so I can do fancy things in this (without copy and pasting like...) **this** and *this* .

Another thing! We got asked about pronouns last chapter. Mine (Ellis) are they/them and A-Authors are they/it. So if you wanna insult us, now you know how to do it!

In Which Tommy Is A Good Friend

Chapter Notes

Hello all! I'm back on my bullshit again, with another chapter!

WARNINGS: nightmares (however tommy doesn't remember his, and the others are just mentions). Lots of not great things implied (selling people as weapons, entrapping those people, etc). However, this chapter is quite fluffy until Tommy gets back from work.

As always, a summary at the end! Stay safe and enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's not that Tommy didn't absolutely love his friends. He did.

But he had to go to work.

And Ranboo was clinging to him.

Poor sod had been a bit useless for the past three days, rightfully so, he'd gotten some time off work and school, Tommy, (who also had time off work, and legally had graduated) had stayed with him.

Ranboo the last couple of days had been a mess. Fair enough. He'd been having some of the worst nightmares that Tommy had ever seen him have, Tubbo had been the same way as well.

Somehow Tommy was the put together one.

Which led back to Ranboo clinging to him.

Ranboo is asleep, an arm thrown around Tommy's waist and snoring softly.

Tommy has two options. One, call Wilbur or Techno and tell him he's going to be late because his roommate is currently having a bit of a relapse in trauma recovery and he needs to be here. Two, take Ranboo with him.

Nope.

Tommy reaches for his phone.

The first contact is Techno, he fumbles for a bit, before managing to click on the contact. It rings a few times, and Tommy holds it up to his ear.

"Hullo."

"Hey Techno... uh, can't make it in today, or I'll be late. I'm really, really sorry, I know I've been off for a while already but-"

"That's alright," Techno yawns, "I'll tell Phil and Wil. Are you alright?"

"Yeah..." Tommy looks at Ranboo, who still has his arm around Tommy and is snoring softly. "One of my roommates... haven't been having a great time."

"Oh, sick?"

"Not really," Tommy says.

Ranboo makes a small noise, and Tommy runs his fingers through his hair, hoping that'll relax the hybrid, and considering that he doesn't make the same strangled noise after, he'd say it helped.

“Just... y’know, life.”

“I do,” Techno sighs, “Well, take care of your roommate.”

“Will do.”

“You could potentially do your work from home,” Techno says, although he sounds a bit different. “Wilbur, go away... yes I can talk on the phone...” Wilbur’s voice says something that Tommy can’t quite make out. “No, I haven’t made a PR disaster. I will though.”

“Please don’t,” Tommy says weakly, “I’m still dealing with Wilbur kicking a vigilante off a roof, do you know how hard this is to spin?”

Techno laughs, “Good luck. Take care of your roommate.” And then Techno hangs up.

Okay then.

Tommy leans back slightly, and decides that he’s going to try to wake Ranboo up now. It’s slightly too late for his liking, and if both of them don’t want to ruin their sleep schedules, they’ll need to start doing stuff now.

“Ranboo,” Tommy whispers, and shakes him slightly.

Ranboo screeches, and a hand flies up.

Tommy catches it, and for a moment they just look at each other.

“I am so sorry,” Ranboo starts, his eyes wide and mouth open ready to start spewing apologies.

“It’s okay,” Tommy says, and lets go of Ranboo’s wrist.

“You have work.”

“Took today off,” Tommy got up off the couch, and started raiding the pantry. Noodles. A lot and a lot of noodles, with Tommy’s first pay cheque (even though he’d been in the hospital for most of it) they bought... just a lot of noodles.

They were yet to get any real vegetables.

Ranboo sighs, and buries his head in his hands.

“You alright, boob boy?”

“Don’t call me that.”

“Sorry.”

“I’m...” Ranboo ran a hand down his face, looking up at Tommy. “Not great, if I’m being completely honest.”

“You need a therapist.”

“I do.”

“We all need a therapist.”

“We do.”

“Do you reckon it’s in my hospital cover?” Tommy asks, “Maybe... I’ll ask Phil next time I see him.”

“Cool,” Ranboo mutters, and pulls at the sleeves of his hoodie. “Do you know I used to have a tail?”

Tommy does. He nods.

Ranboo takes a deep breath, his hands clenched into fists and his eyes looking further away than usual. “I was in the ring...” he wipes at his eyes, and Tommy hopes there’s no scarring. “And... first fight, I lost. So they just... lobbed it off I guess.”

“Ranboo.” His voice is soft.

“It was so long ago,” Ranboo says, “I was like... eleven, why am I still scared?”

“You’re allowed to be scared,” Tommy says, taking a few steps into the kitchen. “I’m still scared of a lot of things. Things that don’t make sense, Tubbo is too, sometimes he can’t see spare parts without freaking out. The smell of some cleaning products still make me uneasy. You’re allowed to be scared.”

The silence settles around them, it wasn’t comfortable or uncomfortable it was just silence.

So that was how Tommy spent his day, watching movies, having naps, making noodles and being glad that he had some strength now and that they had enough money to actually buy some alright food.

“Are you going on patrol?” Ranboo asks, just after watching an entire season of a show.
“Tonight?”

Tommy thinks about it, for a split second before shaking his head. He’s not any sort of idiot, he needs to be laying low right now. Now he’s on the map for Philza fucking Minecraft, and The Blade... which brings a few more questions.

The day was an easy one, and Ranboo and Tommy did not accomplish much.

Tubbo got home earlier than usual, muttering and he slams all of his school books on the table. “Fuck.” He mutters and then kicks over a chair. “I got so much homework to do! I’ve been putting it all off.”

Ranboo and Tommy exchange a look.

Tubbo frowns and sits down on the floor, arms crossed and mumbling.

Then he sits up, “Wait! I’m procrastinating.”

“Huh?” Tommy says, like a true intellect.

“I am going to procrastinate,” Tubbo announces, “I’ll encrypt those files I guess... if I have to.”

Tommy laughs, and Ranboo smiles slightly at that too, although it seems a little bit forced. Not a lot, just forced enough that Tommy picks up on it.

“Only you,” Tommy announces, “Would procrastinate *homework* by unencrypting illegal documents from a laptop that I stole.”

Tubbo nods tiredly, before opening said laptop and cracking his knuckles in a way that made Tommy cringe. “Okay, Ranboo, make food. Tommy... I dunno what you can do, start Twitter beef with yourself.”

Tommy pulls a face.

“You have a Theseus account,” Tubbo continues, slamming his hands on the keyboard at what appears to be a failed attempt. “You uploaded that photo of you peace signing on top of that building, that proves it’s you. Surely you have a social media account through the agency.”

“I do.”

Something wild dances in Tubbo’s eyes. “Well,” he says, “Start Twitter beef with yourself... that’s funny.”

Tommy grins, and hunches over his phone.

He is going to start so much Twitter beef with himself.

[@arandomintern](#): yo [@theseusiguess](#) please fall off a cliff again, you’re making a fucking nightmare for me.

So he cackles slightly, and puts his phone down.

He’ll reply to himself later.

Ranboo found his way to the kitchen, stumbling slightly and clomping around like the disaster he was. Tommy found himself on the couch watching TV.

A peaceful, average day.

Tommy went to sleep, and prayed that Tubbo or Ranboo wouldn't have a nightmare, because he's tired. It's a selfish thing to wish for, he knows that, but he's tired, and due to the nightmares the other two are having, Tubbo has banned him to sleep out in the lounge room.

His last thoughts before drifting off to sleep are wishing that Tubbo and Ranboo won't wake up screaming and thrashing, and that they can get the peaceful sleep that they deserve.

Then he wakes up.

And he's the one screaming and thrashing.

Jerking himself awake there's a small flash of red and something to his left falls over and smashes onto the ground.

For a moment, Tommy stays there, breathing in and out.

He doesn't need to remember what the dream is.

It's always the same thing.

Even if he can't remember the details, it always ends in the same thing, him screaming and a flash of red that blinds everything. Then a deep red, and his footsteps, small and childlike running down the streets.

The dim light from the streetlamps comes into the room through a gap in the window and Tommy is still heaving for breath.

There's no noise coming from the bedroom, no one shuffling around, so Tommy sighs and leans back against the side of the couch. He covers his face and if he cries, no one's there to see it.

Shockingly enough, Tommy is exhausted.

He stumbles his way to work.

Public transport is always a nightmare. Creepy people pressing against others in a way that they definitely don't need to do, people dropping coffee all over others, conversations that would never happen again, those sort of meaningful, yet meaningless conversations only capable of happening on a metro.

He's half-asleep, and listening to his music.

It's been a while since he actually showed up at work.

Still he walks into the tower, and flashes his card at Kristin. Kristin smiles with an odd amount of fondness for someone who barely knows him, and Tommy gives a bright smile back.

Floor 69, the SBI floor, with offices, a communal area and a training room (Tommy had only just been told about that), and apparently a bunch of bedrooms to pass out in, which is objectively hilarious.

Again... SBI being on floor 69, hilarious, comedy gold, an original joke which has never been done before.

The second he's out of the elevator, Wilbur has grabbed him and is cowering behind him.

“Tommy, Tommy, Tommy, listen to me, listen to me. Philza Minecraft is about to throw me out a window, you gotta save me.” Wilbur grips Tommy a bit harder.

“Where are you, you shit?” He hears Phil yell, and Tommy, ever the social media manager, gets out his phone and starts recording.

Wilbur makes a noise. “I have a hostage!” Wilbur yells back, “And I’m not afraid to utilise that to my advantage.”

Tommy just points his camera at the doorway.

Phil steps into the doorway, like a glorious beacon of light, and stands there like the angel he is. For a while his camera doesn’t adjust, making an amazing image of Phil standing there like some sort of deity.

Then the light levels adjust, and Phil looks furious.

Wilbur squeals like a child behind Tommy. “Phil, Phil please, *Dad*, we can talk this out, healthy communication and all, y’know how it is, what the therapist says about healthy communication!”

Tommy is shaking with laughter.

Phil is glaring.

“Phil!” Wilbur exclaims again, and grabs Tommy a bit more. “I have a hostage! I will cause grievous bodily harm to said hostage, if you don’t back away and we sort this out.”

“Try it,” Phil muses.

First of all, technically Wilbur has done grievous bodily harm to Tommy. (Kicking him off a building and all, and then slamming him into a wall and breaking several of his ribs...)

Second of all, Tommy will never do anything to inconvenience Philza Minecraft (including getting stabbed slightly.)

“No can do Wilbur,” Tommy says and makes a noise, “I will never do anything to inconvenience Philza Minecraft, the only man ever. No matter how small that option can be... Philza Minecraft, do what you must.”

Phil cackles, throwing his head back slightly and shaking his head. “Well then Tommy... I am sorry for what I’m about to do.”

Wilbur screams, and drags Tommy back slightly.

With a battle cry, one that Tommy does not deserve to hear.

Phil leaps forwards and at Tommy, going straight through Tommy and knocking both him and Wilbur over. Phil manages to flap his wings slightly so that he’s next to Wilbur, rather than Tommy.

Tommy manages to roll to the side, kicking Wilbur in the side for good measure, and he’s up on his feet, recording the scene.

The scene was as follows, Phil with a hat, an ugly striped thing which is white and green and hitting Wilbur with it. Wilbur is laughing, but trying to spit out any words, which doesn’t quite work.

He’s wheezing and Phil is grinning.

There’s a sigh behind him, and Tommy turns his head, but not the camera away from this

hilarious scene.

Techno has his arms crossed, and is sighing softly, shaking his head. However, there's something fond and soft in his eyes that Tommy doesn't miss.

"Children. The both of them. How are we the youngest?"

"I think that's called being family," Tommy muses, as Wilbur cackles again.

Techno shrugs, "How are you?"

"Good."

"How's the roommate?"

Wilbur screeches and Phil picks him up like a ragdoll.

"Better."

"Good to hear," Techno says. "Oi!" Techno yells, "Stop it."

"Uh oh," Wilbur stage-whispers, "Fun police is here."

Phil's face contorts into one of disapproval and he puts Wilbur back on his feet. "Techno, have you been sleeping?"

Techno pulls a face, "Technoblade never sleeps."

“Technoblade is about to get knocked the fuck out,” Phil says, and his eyes are concerned as he looks at Techno. “Get some sleep, reading up on hybrids all night isn’t healthy for you.”

Again, he shrugs. “Did you know, some spider hybrids can manipulate density? Not a lot, it’s a weird off-shoot effect. Hybrids are also just names for people who are given physical and visible side-effects from their powers.” He yawns, “The legal definition means that you’re a hybrid.”

Phil laughs, it’s filled with warmth. “Go to sleep Techno, go home. You have the next few days off, get some sleep.”

“You’re not my dad,” Techno yawns.

“But you’re my kid,” Phil responds.

Tommy feels like he’s missing something.

He feels like he’s missing a lot actually.

Tommy makes the wise move to stop recording (partly so that Wilbur stops death-glaring him. He gets it, no soft moments online, he was too busy being shocked to do much.)

The family SBI tree is looking very confused in his head right now.

Everyone knows that Wilbur is Phil’s kid (adopted and all), it’s one of those things out to the public. What no one can figure out is how Techno is related to it all.

Apparently Techno is Phil’s “kid” which can mean a multitude of things that he can’t be bothered to try and unpack right now.

Wilbur is looking at him funnily.

A dog barks from nowhere, snapping Tommy out of his concerns.

A small dog with skittering footsteps is running across the ground, a small white dog who is running right at Tommy and barking. For some reason, Tommy doesn't feel too scared.

Techno opens his mouth, "Floof, no!"

The dog jumps and knocks Tommy to the ground.

For a split second Tommy is scared, before there's the semi-familiar feel of a dog licking his face. Tommy laughs and attempts to fight off the dog, before succumbing to laughter.

The dog licks his face, and Tommy laughs. "No, no," he laughs with his hands up, "Don't, don't," he wheezes, "It tickles."

"Did Floof..." Phil starts.

"Not attack someone new?" Wilbur finishes.

"Help!" Tommy cries out, "I have a beast attacking- ah stop it!"

Floof, apparently that's what this animal is called. Stops and looks at Tommy, head tilted and eyes looking at him. Tommy looks back, before bringing a sleeved arm up to his face and rubbing at his dog dribbled covered face.

Everyone's silent.

"Yeah?" Tommy says, looking at three shocked faces. "Are you all good?"

"He... didn't attack you," Wilbur adds again, clarifying *so* much (and no, that isn't sarcastic, not *at all*). "That's... odd for Floof, he's an aggressive dog."

"He is not!" Techno adds, holding his arms out and the small dog runs into them. "He's my therapy dog," Techno explains, "He's a big softie, and has never done anything bad."

"I still have scars from him biting me!" Wilbur yells, and everyone ignores him.

Floof barks with what Tommy would call joy (he doesn't know much about dogs, but it seems like it's a happy sort of bark.)

Techno sighs and hugs Floof, "He attacks people he doesn't know," Techno explains and narrows his eyes at Tommy. "Have you broken into my apartment?"

"I... don't think so?"

"Wow, that sounds confident," Wilbur adds, and everyone ignores him.

"Cool," Techno says.

Floof jumps out of his arms, and sprints away.

"Don't bite Quackity!" Techno yells after Floof, like a dog can understand English. Floof seems to pause for a moment, mulling it over, before starting his sprint again and barking his way down the hallway. "I am... going to stop him from biting Quackity again."

Phil smiles, and nods.

Techno leaves, sighing.

About thirty seconds later there's the noise of someone who sounds like Quackity screaming, which makes Phil laugh and Wilbur smiles like he's trying to suppress a laugh.

Then there's barking, Techno saying something and then Quackity saying something back in a slightly more frantic voice.

Phil is recording this all, just the sound and him wheezing in the background.

Tommy will have to get that footage off Phil.

Soon after that, he goes into his office and starts by looking through any new emails and stuff he's gotten. There's nothing of there of value, so Tommy takes a brief moment to Tweet as Theseus.

(Look, he's using the Wi-Fi here, surely they have secure connections that are much more difficult to trace back.)

[@theseusiguess](#) : wtf, [@arandomintern](#) maybe your boss shouldn't kick people off of buildings. Then we wouldn't be in this issue. WOULD WE?

Tommy can't help himself, and switches to his other account.

[@arandomintern](#): [@theseusiguess](#) MAYBE GET A REAL JOB AND DON'T GET KICKED OFF ROOFS. YOU ABSOLUTE FOOL.

Then he goes back to his work, like a good little worker who makes minimum wage. (Okay that's not true, he doesn't make minimum wage, but it's hilarious to joke about and who's going to stop him anyway?)

The rest of the day is a quiet one, Tommy uploads the video of Phil attacking Wilbur with his hat and captions it. "Another... another hat fight" because that is objectively hilarious and everyone else seems to think so too.

Nothing else exciting happens, Tommy spends his time only half doing work, half scrolling through social media, which is technically his job for now.

There's a knock at the door, and Techno is leaning in the doorway. "Hey."

"Hi?"

"I have an interview, not tomorrow, but the next day."

"Is that my problem?" Tommy asks, it's ruder than he meant and Techno raises his eyebrows at that. "What I meant... is that something I need to do work for?"

"I reckon," Techno shrugs, "I hate all the PR people apart from you, so you're going to manage this."

"I am nineteen."

"I doubt that," Techno mutters, "But sure, you can manage an interview. Make sure I don't fuck up too much, make sure that I don't get myself in trouble, Phil doesn't kill me and I don't answer any questions about my past."

“Holy shit,” Tommy adds, fumbling for a piece of paper, “We need a list?”

“We need a list,” Techno grabs a chair, dragging it in front of Tommy’s desk and sitting down. “Okay, no tragic backstory questions, probably don’t let them ask about why I call my sword orphan obliterator... what SBI stands for, anything about Wilbur’s recent mistakes.”

Tommy shakes out his hand, and writes a little bit faster.

“Also about the treason I committed that one time.”

“You’ve... committed treason,” Tommy sighs, “And I’m currently doing PR work for you? Define treason.”

“I may have tried to stab some government officials.”

Tommy sighs, “When was this?”

“Before.”

“Before?”

“That’s all I’m saying.”

Tommy groans and hits his head on the table a few times, wishing for a sweet and merciful death. Maybe he should just quit and hedge his luck with being a waiter or something, that almost went well last time, until the establishment went up in smoke.

When Tommy eventually looks up, Techno is amused.

“Where’s Floof?”

“Dunno,” Techno shrugs, “Probably pesterin’ Kristin for food, he learnt to use the elevators. I can ask Henry.”

“He’s up and running again?”

“To a degree,” Techno looks up at the roof, “Hey, Henry? Where’s Floof?”

There’s the noise of something beeping, “Floof is on the first floor, he is currently running around in circles and amusing all of the people here on tour. Would you like me to contact someone to retrieve him?”

“No, thank you,” Techno looks back at Tommy, “Thank you Henry.”

“You and Wilbur are both very polite to Henry.”

“When the AI rises up,” Techno gives Tommy a look, “I want Henry on my side. Also he’s very polite.”

Tommy rolls his eyes, and looks back at piece of paper covered in instructions. “Is that all? Do I need to ask the interviewer what sorta questions they’re going to ask?”

“Yup.”

“Great.”

“Good luck,” Techno stands up, puts the chair back and leaves.

Tommy sighs as the door latches quietly. He isn’t qualified for shit... he doesn’t have any people skills and he needs a nap.

He’ll demand a raise after this.

Several raises.

He looks back at the list on the paper and sighs again.

Something traitorous in the back of his head wonders why Techno had so many things he didn’t want to talk about.

The underpaid part of his brain doesn’t care.

He ends up deciding that he doesn’t care, not enough to pursue it at least.

Instead he goes the long (and annoying) route of getting in contact with the people doing the interview, making sure that none of the questions have anything to do with the things Techno said were off the table.

He really, really deserves to be paid more.

He gets home on public transport, because of course he does, and he only needs to elbow one person out of the way and ignore one mugging happening because he does not get paid enough to deal with this.

(Other people had this under control, Tommy just wanted to go home.)

He gets home, opening the apartment door.

Tubbo is sitting at the table, surrounded by papers, a pen in his mouth and Ranboo sitting next to him, leaning over so he's looking at the computer.

"Tommy!" Tubbo exclaims, "Come here, right now," he gestures and Tommy walks over, setting his bag down on the floor next to them. "Okay, okay, so... this is kinda a long story... a length story, so, so, so."

Tommy grins slightly at his friend's antics for a moment, and Tubbo responds with a deep breath and tries to collect his thoughts.

"So first of all this laptop is super encrypted. Like all the data is written in codes and stuff, that's no trouble," Tubbo slaps the binder on the table, it's filled with papers and codes and coding lines that Tommy just understood. "Now, it's asymmetrical encryption, Tommy, you know what a nightmare that is to get around."

Tommy shudders slightly, "So much manual reverse engineering."

"Yup!" Tubbo claps his hands together. "So side channels and ciphertext analysis were the best ways in. Theory is that to access all of this data you get given the private key from whatever headquarter. Basic enough... I go through that nightmare process, I find all the things that I gotta find."

Tommy nods slowly.

"And this is all the useful information," Tubbo shifts the laptop so that Tommy is looking at it. "Two names... two names I have not seen before in my life, went through the government records I could find... birth certificates and nothing."

“What names?” Tommy asks and squints at the laptop.

“Fruit... and... Squid?”

“Those have got to be code names,” Ranboo says, scouring over something on his phone.
“Those aren’t real names.”

“Your name is Ranboo,” Tubbo argues, “I’m Tubbo... like... weird names aren’t exactly rare.”

“Squid and Fruit?” Tommy deadpans, “That’s particularly odd.”

Tubbo hums and leans back in his seat, “Everything else is just... administrative things... with companies and stuff, just money transfers and stuff. I can’t figure out why there are money transfers.”

“They sell the tech,” Ranboo adds, “At least... that’s what the written files say.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Tommy asks, looking at his friend who looks uneasy to say the least. “Ranboo, this might be important, what do you mean?”

Ranboo looks down at his hands, “Well... is the tech overpriced?”

“Yup,” Tubbo chimes, “The stuff that I made is not worth what they’re selling it for.”

“Can I look at the financial records?” Ranboo asks.

Tubbo nods and passes the laptop over. For a moment Ranboo scrolls up and down using the trackpad and he winces slightly. “I don’t think they’re hiring out the tech.”

“Holy shit!” Tubbo snatches the laptop back, “You think they’re hiring out fighters?”

Ranboo nods.

Tommy sits down.

The cages. The cages make sense.

Tommy shudders, and looks at Ranboo, who’s looking smaller

For a long moment they all sit there.

“We’re going to need Technoblade,” Tubbo says. “Something I forgot to mention... in trying to get that key from the headquarters... I think we found it.”

“What?” Tommy manages. “We found it?”

Tubbo shrugs, “A location, at the very least... somewhere that we can raid, see what happens.”

“Holy shit,” Tommy mutters and runs a hand through his hair. “Holy shit. Can we topple this thing?”

“It’s looking that way,” Tubbo mutters, “I have the funniest feeling that uprooting this thing will cause... so many problems. Do you want to do that?”

Tommy runs a hand down his face, “It’s a difficult thing to do by myself.”

“You have the ragtag vigilante team,” Ranboo adds, “Purpled, Aurelian, Slimecicle... Technoblade. If something releases on you, you have people behind you.”

Tommy sighs and runs a hand down his face. “I’ll think about it.”

And it’s true.

He does think about it, and he backs himself out of doing it, because he’s a coward. He’s a coward, and a child and he doesn’t know how he’d even start dismantling a screwed up thing.

He thinks about it.

He sleeps on the couch again.

(Ranboo and Tubbo are still having nightmares that wake Tommy up, and they’re trying to distance themselves so that Tommy stops waking up in the night to them screaming. It’ll never work.)

He thinks, he ponders.

Then Ranboo wakes up screaming and thrashing and begging for his life. In struggling breaths, Tommy can’t do anything but watch as Ranboo shakes and cries and begs that he’s spared.

Yeah.

Tommy made up his mind the second that he shot awake and Ranboo screamed.

Now is the question of how to topple something that has been around longer than himself.

He supposes the first thing is to investigate the location that Tubbo gave him.

The second thing is to make whoever hurt his best friend's wish that they'd never laid a hand on anyone.



Chapter End Notes

Summary: After the last chapter, Ranboo is struggling with nightmares and so Tommy enjoys three days that he was given off of work (and then asks Techno for another day off, which he grants.) They have a conversation about therapy. Tubbo gets back from school and procrastinates homework by encrypting some very concerning files.

Tommy starts Twitter beef with himself. Has a nightmare that he can't quite remember and goes to work with Wilbur and Phil in one of their play arguments. Techno is also

there. Tommy meets Floof and befriends him immediately. Techno reveals he has an interview soon, which Tommy will have to manage.

When Tommy goes home, Tubbo reveals what he's found. They all come to the conclusion that the underground fighting rings that they've been fighting against appear to have been selling off their fighters and with an address that they can check out, Tommy mulls over whether this is worth it. (After Ranboo has a nightmare, Tommy decides that "fuck it" he's doing this thing.)

HELLO ALL, IT IS I, AUTHOR ELLIS. This chapter took so long because brain said *no* and now I am here. Sadly Author A's laptop/pc (i still don't really know which one they have) has not been fixed yet. Which is a tragedy and means that I have mostly creative freedom until their laptop/pc gets fixed.

And... with what we have planned.

Heh. Good luck for the future. (Next chapter is like just fluff tho, so hold onto that).

Also all the @'s go to things, whether fics I enjoy, YouTube clips or other things (i honestly forgot what I put in them)

That Time Wilbur Was An Idiot (one of many)

Chapter Notes

HELLO YOUNG ONES. IT IS I... ELLIS, BACK AT IT AGAIN.

Warnings: Touch-starved Innit... uh... some violence implied, but nothing worse than anything you've already read. This one is very fluffy boiz

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Wilbur is a fucking idiot.

It's not like this is a new fact to Techno. Techno's known him for about eight years now. He's seen Wilbur at his best (well what must be his best because it went downhill from there) and his worst.

When Wilbur was seventeen, and Techno was too he had watched Wilbur say "are babies technically people?" And for about three hours Techno and Wilbur had argued the logistics and if babies counted as people. Phil had walked in heard the sentence "they don't have thoughts!" Then left.

Techno had won that argument, but it started a theme that could not be stopped.

Techno had also been told a story from when Wilbur was a kid, about ten or so, he had apparently looked Phil in the eyes and said "isn't a dog just a tall giraffe?"

Which led to some interesting out of context sentences such as.

"I'm going to keep my ears until the day I die."

Or masterpieces such as "I'm pattin' my milk."

Then Wilbur would go off the most poetic rants that Techno had ever heard about the life and fate of the universe, and why everything they did meant something.

All in all, Wilbur was the smartest dumbass Techno had ever met.

Which led Techno to where he is currently sitting, legs on the desk, while Wilbur is pacing in front of him. He pauses, looks at the roll-in white board that he brought in here and then starts pacing again.

He looks at the blurry photo of Theseus printed out and with magnets holding it to the whiteboard. There are a bunch of arrows and notes that Wilbur has added frantically.

Techno sighs again and looks back at his report.

“We just have no idea!” Wilbur exclaims, “I want to apologise to him.”

Techno hums, and ignores him, instead reading a report about hybrid traits and the rising percentage of hybrid people. Wilbur knocks on his desk, and Techno looks over the report and glares.

“What?”

“We’re trying to figure out who Theseus is.”

“*You’re* trying to figure out who Theseus is,” Techno looks back down at his reports, pausing on one of percentages about the rising level of arachnid hybrids and the potential causes. “Floof and I are trying to learn about hybrids.”

Wilbur sighs. “Techno, help me.”

“Nah.”

There’s a knock at the door, and Tommy is standing there, blond hair, slightly scrappy clothes, but looking the best that Techno’s ever seen him. The effects of some breaks, some better food and actual medical attention.

He looks tired, but otherwise okay.

“Tommy!” Wilbur exclaims and Techno takes note of the way that Tommy looks shocked for a moment... almost wary.

Interesting.

“What do you know about Theseus?”

“Huh?” Is what Tommy says, and Techno starts laughing.

Like, really laughing.

Both Wilbur and Tommy look at him, very, very confused to say the least. Techno keeps laughing, aware he sounds like a goose.

“Yeah Tommy,” Techno laughs, “What do you know about Theseus?”

Tommy blinks at him. “Uh... vigilante... made a PR nightmare for me and I got into beef on Twitter with him.”

Techno laughs harder.

Wilbur looks confused. Tommy looks very nervous. He glances at Wilbur. “Check Twitter.”

Wilbur scrambles to grab his phone. He pauses for a few moments, before looking at Tommy, looking back at his phone, and then looking at Tommy again. “You got in Twitter beef... with fucking Theseus?”

Techno suppresses his laughter, and reaches out for his phone.

1. ● Superheroes ● Trending

#tommyvstheseus

10.6k Tweets

Techno pulls a face, and looks at Tommy, who looks awkward to say the least.

“What did you say?” Wilbur asks, “Please, please, where is the thread?”

Tommy grumbles something, and looks down at the floor, looking like he’s regretting every decision that he’s ever made. Techno stifles yet another laugh.

That’s how they discover that Tommy tweeted at Theseus, and Theseus replied, and that led to this chaos that is currently happening. Techno laughs as Tommy explains it and goes redder and redder.

“I was mad about being given a media nightmare to work with,” Tommy explains, still looking slightly guilty and Techno laughs. “So... found out that Theseus had a Twitter account, and it’s actually him there are some photos and stuff of him up on buildings. Then... Tweeted at him, and he replied.”

Wilbur wheezes from his spot on the ground. “You’re fraternizing with the enemy!” He yells.

Tommy’s eyes dart around for a bit, and he shrugs. “Fraternizing with the enemy has saved your career.”

Which is true. It has done that.

Techno’s eyes dart back to the report.

Floof yaps. He looks at Tommy, to the blurry photo of Theseus that is on the whiteboard. Floof looks back at Tommy and yaps again.

Tommy’s eyes go wide for a moment.

Techno rolls his eyes. “Wilbur’s trying to apologise to Theseus,” he sighs and Wilbur’s nose wrinkles up.

“Are you?”

“Am I?”

“Wilbur you had a breakdown ten minutes ago because you were sorry,” Techno deadpans, “You’re a good actor, but you’re not that good.”

He grumbles something underneath his breath, and Techno’s eyes settle on the report. “Why did you come in Tommy?”

“Oh, yeah,” Tommy adjusts his jacket. “Uh, interview thing? That’s today.”

Techno sighs, “How long ago was it supposed to start?”

“Five minutes ago.”

“Yup.” Techno stands up, putting the report on the desk and looking at Wilbur, then at Floof.
“Floof, you’re in charge. He’s not allowed in my seat.”

“I’m not going to sit in your seat!” Wilbur calls out as Techno gets out the door, “I don’t need anymore scars.”

With an eye roll, Techno closes the door behind him and looks at Tommy. He looks...
frazzled to say the least, like something just shifted in his brain, and he looks like he hasn’t
had a lot of sleep.

Tommy takes a steadying breath, and Techno pretends he doesn’t notice it. “Okay,” Tommy
says, walking in-step with Techno as they approach the elevator. “Okay, so basically, it’s
going to be live-streamed on the L’Manburg news website and on one of their stations. So
messing this up will not be a good look.”

“Got it.”

“Uh... some questions are going to be about my beef with Theseus, what you think of
vigilantes, powers-”

“No.”

“No?”

“I’m not answering anything about my enhancements,” Techno keeps his head forward and his face expressionless but that doesn’t stop his stomach from dropping slightly and a silent panic taking hold of his body for a split second.

He glances at Tommy, who looks confused. His mouth is open to say something, and Techno already knows what it is.

“Yes, I have an enhancement. No, I’m not telling anyone what it is.”

“That wasn’t on the list!” Tommy swears several times underneath his breath, before getting out his phone. “I fuckin’ hate it here, I need a pay rise.”

Tommy pauses, “Why the fuck do you call it an enhancement?”

“Hmm?”

“Everyone calls them powers.”

“Well mine’s an enhancement.”

“That implies you weren’t born with it,” Tommy adds, absent-mindedly and laughing down at his phone.

Techno doesn’t reply.

Tommy looks at him, eyes wide. “You... weren’t born with a power?”

Techno waves a hand, “We’re not having this conversation. It doesn’t matter. I’m not talking about my enhancements. I’m not speaking on Wilbur’s and Phil’s behalf on anything, or

whatever else is on that list.”

Tommy sighs, and groans, “I deserve a pay rise.”

Techno shrugs, the pair of them enter the elevator and Tommy runs a hand down his face.

“If they ask about your Twitter drama, you can take the question.”

“Can I?” Tommy lightens up, suddenly looking around the age that Techno suspects he is.

Techno just nods once.

Tommy grins.

The elevator dings, and Techno takes a deep breath. He hates interviews. Apparently trying to speedrun the end of his career isn’t the best way to do interviews.

Tommy looks at him, eyes concerned for a split second. “I’ll cut in if you’re really uncomfortable.”

“Thanks.”

Tommy shakes out his hands.

The elevator door opens.

First thing is an entire camera crew operating. The second thing is that they'll just be doing this on some seats. There are two set up, facing each other and Techno glances at Tommy.

Tommy's already gone, he's talking to someone in a suit who has a tablet and nodding.

Welp, the introvert has lost his emotional support extrovert. Looks like he's going to go stand in a corner and wait for someone to find him.

(That happened at a party once. Techno had lost Wilbur, and then he'd stood in a corner glaring at everyone until Wilbur collected him, and was slightly drunk and stumbling all over the place. It was an interesting story, that was for sure.)

Tommy looks across and at Techno, "Go sit down," Tommy smiles, "We'll bring up another chair in a moment... I guess."

Techno nods and walks over to the chair, he sits in the one that looks more comfortable and crosses his legs, feeling a lot fancier than he felt and folding his hands in his lap. He probably looks about half as uncomfortable as he feels.

He looks around at everyone, deciding that he could quickly take all of them in a fight. What he doesn't like is that he knows, he knows that there will be eyes on him, analysing his every move and action.

With a sigh, Techno looks up at the roof. He could just hesitate on an answer for a few split seconds and then it's trending on social media (that happened with Phil once.)

"Hello," someone says, and Techno looks up.

It's a man with brown hair, a purple and green hoodie, a bright smile and a tablet in hand. Techno feels like he recognises him.

“Do I know you?”

“I’m on the news,” he says happily, “Karl Jacobs, I do the reports on vigilantes. Don’t quite know how I landed this gig, but I’m happy to be here.”

“I... am not.”

Karl laughs, and throws his head back, he has a bit of an odd laugh (but so does Techno so he’s not judging.)

“Uh... I have a list of things you don’t want to talk about,” Karl taps at the tablet in hand. “Are any of them negotiable?”

“Not really.”

“Cool,” Karl sits down. “So I’m guessing no talking about that time you stabbed the head of the treasury?”

“Nope.”

“Excellent,” Karl claps his hands together and Tommy drags a chair over, and sits next to Techno. “Um...” he looks at Techno, “Who’s this.”

“Tommy,” Tommy says, “Person behind the Twitter drama with Theseus. Also SBI’s social media... manager? Is that my official title?”

“Somehow,” Techno mutters, “Pretty good for a *nineteen* year old.”

Karl lights up, “Woah, that’s incredible. At nineteen? Were you the one that uh... Shelly, I’m not sure where she is, was in contact with?”

“I am.”

Karl whistles, and looks clearly impressed. “Well... if your job doesn’t work out here, we’d be ecstatic to have you.”

Tommy glances at Techno, and Techno shrugs. “Probably don’t talk about job offers with one of my bosses here,” he jerks his head at Techno. “After, however... how much would you guys pay?”

“More than these guys.”

Techno groans, “Alright, alright. Tommy, if you leave me for journalists I am going to kick you.”

Tommy huffs and crosses his arms.

Karl laughs. “What’s wrong with journalists?” He asks.

Techno gives him a look.

Karl laughs louder, and shakes his head slightly.

“On in fifteen!” Someone calls out.

Like that Karl sits up slightly straighter, his demeanor changing. Not completely, but just enough that Techno notices it and glances around.

Quickest entrance would be the window, second is the door. The easiest weapon to use is the chairs, but it might not be the most effective. If a fight broke out Techno would go for one of the camera stands. They're heavy, and could knock someone out (or just be property damage.)

Karl clears his throat and Techno's eyes snap back to him.

"Today I'm joined by everyone's favourite vigilante turned hero, Techno... who has an undisclosed last name."

Techno snorts and Tommy glances at him. "Yup."

"So... Techno, can I ask about the path from being a vigilante to a hero and how that worked?" Karl asks, and hey, it's not about Techno's past directly, and it seems like a fair enough question.

Look, there are lots of vigilantes, and all of them want to be heroes. Most of them, Techno is almost certain that the Purpled kid that he met when he saw Theseus does not want to be a hero.

So from what Techno knows about journalism, it's an excellent question.

Techno sighs and rubs a hand down his face, "Honestly... just be friends with heroes. There are so many problems with that model, but it's how I did it. Or have the government trying to figure out your powers so they recruit you for that."

Tommy snorts.

Karl looks at Tommy and smiles, "For anyone wondering, this is Tommy, the person behind SBI's social media page recently and the Theseus drama on Twitter. Tommy... why did you

decide to argue back?”

“I’m an argumentative person,” Tommy grins.

“Yup,” Techno sighs, “You are.”

“No I’m not.”

Techno looks at the camera and just stares for a moment.

Tommy huffs and crosses his arms, sticking his tongue at Techno and Techno looks at Karl.

“Am I allowed to flip him off?”

“Uh…” Karl glances over his shoulder at some of the crew. “I don’t think so.”

“Wait, can I swear?” Tommy asks, “Swearing is about fifty percent of my personality-”

“That’s true-”

Tommy opens his mouth, and just glares at Techno for a long moment. “Anyone who idolises Techno, do not, he is an adult who watches videos of guinea pigs instead of doing his work.”

Techno pauses and looks at Tommy.

Interesting.

The kid's more observant than he lets on.

Tommy looks back at Karl. "This man is a nightmare."

Karl nods, and looks amused to say the least. "I think anyone with a brain can see that you two are quite brotherly... Tommy, how long have you worked for SBI?"

Tommy laughs.

Techno stays quiet.

Tommy looks at him. "Wait, what?"

"Answer the question, Tommy," Techno deadpans and watches Tommy make up several new stages of grief with all the expressions on his face. Tommy then looks at Karl, his mouth half-open. Techno sighs. "About three weeks, although he's had some medical issues come up and has had a while off work."

Apparently that was the opening that Karl needed, "So," Karl says, "What is the pay like?"

"Um."

Techno wants to die of laughter, because Tommy is the one currently floundering for things to say, rather than Techno. Which is a nice change of pace for his normal interviews, in which Wilbur or Phil need to save him otherwise he became a mess that was number one on trending for at least six hours.

Tommy takes a deep breath and glances at Techno. "Uh. It's more than you think actually, I do not make minimum wage. That's for sure... I mean rent is way easier than it was when I wasn't working here, and these guys are like shockingly accommodating."

“Oh?” Karl says. “Wait... we’ve gotten off-track.”

“We have,” Techno muses, “You were asking me about vigilantes and I said that the easiest way is to befriend a hero.”

Karl nods, and apparently remembers, “Would you say that’s why you’re known for being one of the more... lenient heroes when it comes to vigilantes.”

Techno hums for a moment, thinking for a moment. The long of it is no, but the short of it is yes. He sighs and shuffles in his chair.

“Yeah, I guess,” Techno shifts again and shrugs, “It’s more like... I can relate to them more, like I’ve not made rent before and stuff. And... I honestly can’t relate to a lot of these people that went to all of these private schools that cost more than some of the places I’ve lived in. They’re all okay... I get along with almost everyone in the tower. I just have a soft spot for vigilantes I guess.”

“Well,” Karl glances down at the tablet in his lap, “Have you worked with vigilantes in the past, and would you work with them going forwards?”

“Yup,” Techno grins and folds his hands into his lap, he glances at Tommy who is looking down at his shoes like they’re the most interesting thing in the entire world. “I have before... while I haven’t ever been on a mission with one, I’ve exchanged information and stuff before, and more than willing to directly work with them.”

Karl tilts his head and leans forward. “Oh? That sounds like an invitation.”

“Because it is,” Techno says and glances at Tommy, then looks back at Karl, leaning forward in his seat. “Look. Working with Theseus would really, really piss off some people here and I really enjoy pissing off people here.”

Tommy snorts and nods.

Techno leans back into his seat and gives a sly smile that is going to make people lose their minds and he'll trend on social media for at least an hour (maybe more depending on how real it looks.)

"So Theseus," Techno looks into the camera, "When you inevitably find out about this. I think you know how to contact me."

Karl laughs, "I highly doubt that Theseus is watching this."

Techno shrugs, "He might be."

With another laugh, Karl waves his hand, "So... some say that being a hero is a lonely job. Techno, when was the last time you were hugged? Tommy, you can answer too if you'd like."

Techno laughs, because it's an odd question. "Uh... maybe a day or two ago, Wilbur hugged me to try and save himself from Phil, I get hugged a surprising amount for someone who always has a knife on him."

Tommy is oddly quiet, and Techno isn't going to comment on it, he's going to let it slide and then everything would be alright.

"What about you, Tommy?" Karl asks.

Techno wants to throw Karl a little bit, just yeet him out the window. He takes a deep breath and runs a hand down his face.

Tommy shrugs, "I mean... depends on what you call a hug."

Karl pulls a face, “Okay, what about one of those squishing hugs?”

“Uh,” Tommy shrugs, “I can’t remember.”

Touchstarvedinnit, lonelyinnit, hug, hug, protect, E, /rainbowchat, touchstarvedinnit.

Chat whispers in the back of his brain, and Techno mutters something under his breath, mostly swear words which causes Karl’s gaze to settle on him and look at him with curiosity.

Karl nods, “Techno, and you?”

“An aggressive hug? Like... three days ago.”

“Damn,” Karl mutters, “That’s alright, you’re not that lonely then, despite what the media has theorised.”

“Not lonely, just selective about who I spend my time with,” Techno nods his head towards Tommy who seems to lighten up and smile, a small smile, but one meaningful enough that Techno is so incredibly grateful he did that. “Gotta make sure I actually like ‘em, and Tommy’s alright.”

“Alright?” Tommy laughs.

“Alright,” Techno finishes, “Average at best.”

Tommy snorts and shakes his head slightly.

Karl nods and looks between Tommy and Techno, “Well, it was nice to talk to you. But the news gives us very short segments, so I think this might be wrapping it up. Unless either of you have anything else to add?”

Tommy nods, and shifts forwards so that he’s leaning ahead and he looks at the camera. “Theseus, if you’re out there, I fucking hate you.”

Techno laughs, throwing his head back, and while Karl may not be a fan of the swearing on live TV or directly dissing a vigilante, it’s just objectively funny and anyone who says otherwise is wrong.

Tommy grins and looks back at Karl, “Nice to talk to you man, just know if I ever see Theseus in real life... let’s just say... I will find a knife.”

Techno barks with laughter again, looking at Tommy. “Please don’t stab my potential allies, I don’t have many.”

Tommy laughs, also throwing his head back.

“And we’re done,” someone announces and Tommy grins at that. “Thank you for your cooperation!”

“Glad it’s over,” Techno says and Karl laughs, Techno isn’t joking but these guys don’t need to know that. “Are Tommy and I good to go now?”

Karl nods and smiles, “Again, lovely talking to you both!” His eyes darts to Tommy and settle there, “Yeah... you’re gonna do great things kid. Only nineteen, Jenny, do you believe he’s only nineteen-”

Before Tommy’s head can get too big, Techno stood up and beckoned for Tommy to follow which he did, still glowing from the praise that he got before. He’s standing slightly taller and just looks... content, if he’s being completely honest.

For a moment they just walk to the elevator, in silence, as Techno tries to figure out the best way to handle this situation. Techno is awkward, but it seems like Tommy is just a tad touch starved.

“The hugging question was an odd one,” Techno says instead, it’s neutral ground and easier to back out like this. “Haven’t been asked that question lie that before.”

“Yeah...” Tommy laughs, it’s awkward and forced and Techno knows exactly what he’s supposed to do here.

(As a good person that cares for his worker, no other reasons. Not like he cares about Tommy at all. Techno is not a good person that will ever care about anyone apart from the people he already knew.)

Techno sighs as the elevator opens. “Do you want a hug?”

Tommy jumps, like the words burned him. “No.”

Alright then. Techno shrugs, and steps into the elevator.

“I mean... I wouldn’t be opposed to it?”

Techno rubs at his face and just looks at Tommy, raising an eyebrow. He isn’t great with social cues, and has no idea what this means in stubborn-teenage speak, what the fuck does Tommy actually want? Does Tommy want a hug or not?

“What?”

“Well... a hug would be nice. I guess... not that I want one or anything,” Tommy looks at the other wall, away from Techno and Tommy looks down at his shoes again like they’re the most interesting thing ever.

“Please just use your words, I am awful with social cues.”

Tommy shakes his head, and hugs his arms around his middle.

Okay. His therapist is about to have a field day with this interaction. The entire thing is going to be dissected by her and she’s going to be very right about everything.

:Fine, I don’t want a hug.”

Techno smiles, there we go. “You want a hug?”

“No you prick!” Tommy yells, “I don’t want a hug-”

Techno moves, and wraps his arms around Tommy’s shoulders. They’re about the same height (Tommy is shorter, but not by a lot.) So it’s not that awkward, like Phil and Wilbur hugging can be.

Tommy freezes.

Somehow Techno knows that he’s not uncomfortable, he just... doesn’t know what he’s supposed to be doing. Techno hugs him tight, because sometimes teenagers just need to be hugged until their ribs crack.

Eventually Tommy relaxes, he doesn’t hug Techno back, but he doesn’t go to move away. He sniffles slightly, and Techno hugs him tighter for a moment.

Techno lets go first, and moves back slightly.

Tommy wipes at his eyes furiously, like his tears are poisonous and will kill him if anyone sees him crying over... anything apparently.

“You can just ask me for a hug,” Techno says, looking ahead. “I’m going to give you a hug, I’m not that cruel.”

“I get hugged,” Tommy argues. “Just... not a lot. It makes my roommates feel a bit trapped... so around the shoulders and short hugs but...”

“They don’t like long hugs,” Techno adds and gives a knowing smile. “Wilbur used to be like that for a while. He still is sometimes.”

Tommy nods.

“But I’m almost sure if you asked for a hug, he’d give you a hug.”

The elevator opens and Techno glances at the kid.

They step out and Techno starts on his way to his office and Tommy follows him.

“Public transport is awful,” Tommy groans and drags his feet across the ground. “It’s a five minute walk too! Can I claim this on tax.”

“Uh... I don’t think so.”

Tommy groans, “Everyone is so creepy on there, I’ve had people just staring at me... like what if I’m murdered?”

“I don’t think you’ll be murdered,” Techno opens the door.

Floof is sitting on Techno’s desk, and Wilbur is on the floor, laying on his stomach and watching YouTube. It is also clear to see who has the power advantage in this dynamic. It’s just about as clear as day.

Techno sighs, and Floof doesn’t move from his desk.

“But *public transport*,” Tommy groans.

Wilbur looks up from his phone. “I can pick you up,” he says, “It’s not too much of a detour, I normally pick up Techno days we’re both working.”

Techno smiles, that’s a lie. Wilbur hasn’t picked Techno up since last time it hailed. Most days Techno walks to work anyway, or on the odd occasion the weather is terrible, then Wilbur or Phil will collect him.

But it’s sweet. Sweet enough that Techno keeps his mouth shut for once, and instead nods at Tommy who looks slightly shocked.

“It’s a way outta public transport,” Techno muses and Tommy nods... he looks starstruck again, something that Techno thought Tommy had gotten over. Apparently he hadn’t.

Wilbur sighs, “Don’t worry about it, sometimes he goes all *fanboy* over Phil. Give him like thirty seconds and he’ll start cussing us out again.”

Techno nods, and puts Floof on the ground who barks in process. “No,” Techno says, “This is my desk, and you are no longer in charge.”

Floof gives puppy-dog eyes.

And he's back on the desk as quickly as he was removed.

Tommy nods, "Y-yeah, that would be great Wilbur. Thank you."

Wilbur rolls his eyes, "It's no issue."

That's a lie. It's the opposite direction from where Wilbur lives. Wilbur could spend that extra time getting McDonalds or anything remotely exciting, but he's spending it picking up Tommy.

Tommy stands there for a moment longer.

"I think you have work to do, Tommy," Techno says, amusement in his voice.

Tommy nods and stumbles over his own feet to leave the room, and further down the hallway there's a thumping noise which sounds suspiciously like someone walking into a door.

Wilbur laughs, his eyes still on his phone. He's not laughing at the video though.

Techno just stares at his brother, until he feels eyes on him and looks over his shoulder.

"What?"

"No trouble," Techno says as Floof headbutts his arm. "You said that this was no trouble," he shakes his head and Wilbur looks back at his phone, looking quite embarrassed. "You're getting attached to the kid."

“I’m not!” Wilbur says, voice higher than usual. “I don’t *like* him, I just... don’t want anything bad to happen to him.”

Techno huffs, “Yeah... like you didn’t want anything bad to happen to me.”

“You were a traumatised child,” Wilbur groans, “Of course I didn’t want anything bad to happen to you.”

“Sure, sure,” Techno deadpans, “You don’t care at all about that child.”

“I don’t!”

Techno just shakes his head, “Get outta my office, you have a million reports to read through.”

“Did you do them all at once?”

“Yup.”

Wilbur groans and removes himself as a bad looking ottoman from Techno’s floor. He grumbles, opens the door and closes it.

Techno laughs to himself. “Doesn’t care about the kid,” Techno repeats and laughs again. “Okay then *Wilbur*. ”

Much to no one’s surprise, both Techno and Tommy trend on social media for a good chunk of time. It’s not surprising that Theseus has found out about it, whoever the fuck he might be...

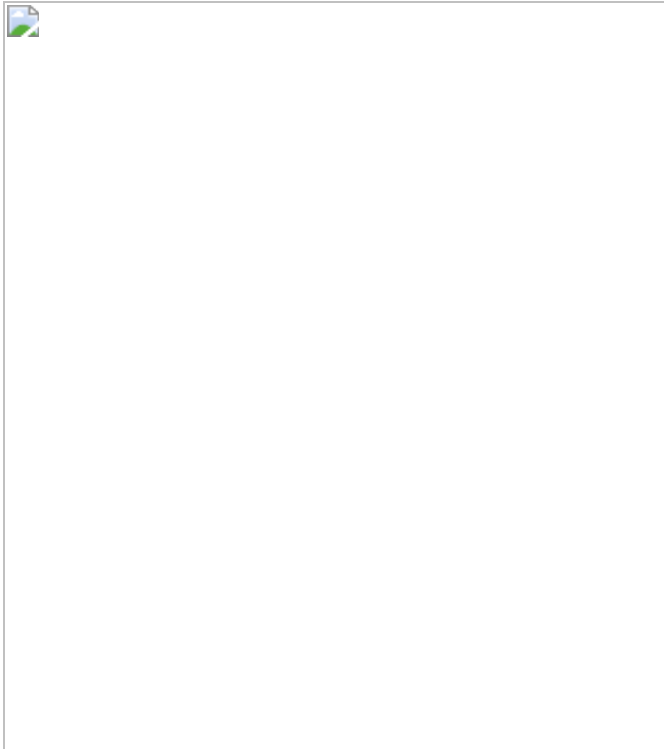
So when there's a note on the door, stuck up by blue-tack, Techno wants to laugh.

We found something.

Meet on the roof of the tower at 10pm tonight.

(Please), Theseus

Techno sighs, but cracks his knuckles. Right. He can do this.





Chapter End Notes

Chapter Summary:

Wilbur schemes about who Theseus may be because he wants to apologise. Tommy walks in and tells them about the Twitter beef. Then Tommy reveals that Techno has an interview and Techno leaves Floof in charge.

They go to said interview, and Tommy joins in because Techno is a bit of a mess and Karl offers Tommy a job in journalism. Karl asks about vigilantes and then asks when's the last time the two of them have been properly hugged. Techno realises that Tommy is slightly touch starved and so on the way back to Techno's office, Techno hugs Tommy and Tommy cries just a little bit.

Tommy complains about public transport and Wilbur offers to pick him up and lies to pretend that it's no trouble. Then Tommy leaves and Wilbur is like "idc about tommy" and techno calls him a liar (rightfully so)

At the end of the chapter there's a note from Theseus, telling Techno they've found something and to meet on top of the watchtower.

Sup, I'm back. With yet another chapter. 4000ish words, does not move the plot forward at all.

Next chapter... oh god. GOOD LUCK Y'ALL

(that one may be longer to come out.)

In Which Things Go Wrong

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Violence (a lot of it), thinking you deserve to be beaten, drugs, needles, cages, dehumanising treatment, depersonalisation (or completely detaching yourself of feelings, another character goes through it.) Knives, vomiting, near death experience(s). Severe morality issues.

This one is rough y'all.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Oi loser,” Wilbur had said, and Tommy had looked up from his computer, “You’re going home.”

“Huh?”

“Techno wants me to finish reports, and you have to go home... so I’m dodging reports, and you can get home.”

“I still have work to do?”

“Nope, you should’ve clocked off by now,” Wilbur leans against the door frame and smiles, Tommy rolls his eyes. “Tommy please, Techno has a soft spot for you and he’s about to murder me. This is self interest.”

“Right,” Tommy sighs and stands up. “Do you even know how to get there?”

“I’ve taken you home before,” Wilbur scoffs, “Come on, I’m bored.”

Tommy rolls his eyes, stretches slightly and starts packing stuff into his backpack.

“Anytime this century.”

“Fuck off.”

Wilbur sighs and turns around, walking away.

Tommy shoves a manila folder into his backpack.

Then he walks after Wilbur, he’s skeptical that the man is about to murder him (it would cause a media outcry for one that someone else would have to deal with.) Tommy is however more worried about how good of a driver he was.

Last time... Wilbur wasn’t the best driver. (But Wilbur had also said that he was doing that to fuck with Tommy.)

It was a nice car, it was black and clean. Tommy had seen it before, and last time the back had been rather clean. Not awfully clean, just... cleanish.

The walk to the carpark is quick enough, with them taking the stairs and Wilbur approaches the black car that Tommy recognises and smiles for a reason he can’t quite place. Wilbur grins and slaps the bonnet of his car.

“There she is.”

“Paid for that one yourself, huh?” Tommy laughs walking over to the passenger’s car.
“Rather than had netherite millionaire Phil pay for it.”

“I hate you.”

“You hate that I’m right,” Tommy muses, “There’s a great one for the Twitter account.”

“How many followers do you have on that account?”

“Hundred thousand,” Tommy laughs and pulls out his phone to check, “Had a huge spike after the interview today, and there’s... fanart.”

Wilbur raises his eyebrows. “Like... bad fanart?”

“No, no, no,” Tommy waves his hand, “Like... drawing me with SBI.”

“Oh,” Wilbur shrugs, “That’s fine, same thing happened to Techno... is there any fanart of you opening Christmas presents? They’re normally pretty quick on that.”

“You are taking this calmly- THERE’S THESEUS FANART?”

Wilbur laughs, but it sounds slightly forced. He opens the car door and Tommy opens his own car door, actually getting in. They both settle in.

Tommy looks over his shoulder.

The car wasn’t clean at all, with rubbish filling the backseats (mostly fast food wrappers and packaging, but a few water bottles), Tommy screws up his nose and Wilbur raises his eyebrows.

“Don’t be a bitch,” Wilbur says, “I see how you live. Don’t critique my car.”

“Aren’t the heroes on diet plans? So they... actually have strength?”

Wilbur sighs and glances at Tommy, then all the rubbish in the back street. “Uh... don’t tell Phil? Techno is worse, he just doesn’t eat the food he needs... then he wonders why his powers don’t work.”

“Huh?”

“Techno’s supposed to eat a lot of pork and bacon and stuff for his powers to work properly... and he does not, so he’s basically as powerless as you.”

Tommy is not going to laugh at the irony of that.

But he exhales forcefully out of his nose.

Wilbur pulls a face at that.

Tommy realises, once again, he has jeopardized himself slightly... again. At this point the fact that he’s Theseus is going to be common fucking knowledge, one of those unspoken things. Like that Philza Minecraft is old, or that Technoblade never sleeps.

“So...” Wilbur says, and there’s the low hum from the car. “What are your roommates like?” There’s some sort of unspoken thing underneath that, Tommy is pretty sure he knows what Wilbur’s implying...

Tommy screws up his nose and turns to glance at Wilbur. “They’re cool, there’s... Tubbo and Ranboo, they’re both super awesome. I’ve known them since I was young... they’re seventeen, so technically I’m their guardian which is weird.”

That’s even weirder because Tommy is younger than them both. (But the government doesn’t know that, what the government knows about Thomas Underscore is that he’s nineteen,

powerless and has a clean record.)

Three things that are just... so not true that it's amusing.

"Yeah, we were all in a bit of a tough spot when we met," Tommy pauses for a moment.

Yeah. That's the way to describe seeing two people covered in blood who just dragged themselves out of a fighting ring.

"And then, it was easier. They're my best friends, I honestly... have no clue what I'd do without them."

Wilbur's silent for a moment. "Oh."

"Yeah."

"Okay."

Tommy laughs and leans back in the seat as Wilbur reverses out onto the road, throwing his feet up on the dash, Wilbur glares at him slightly.

He doesn't move his feet.

Wilbur opens his mouth to say something, closes it, and opens it again. "That is incredibly unsafe."

"You're literally a superhero."

“And? I’m not pushing my luck, feet down.”

“No.”

“If I stop, I’ll shatter some bones in your legs. If you don’t wanna... walk or run, or whatever the fuck teenagers do, put your feet down.” Wilbur snaps, eyes on the road as they pull out of the security checkpoint (Wilbur showing his ID) and they get nodded ahead.

Tommy sighs and puts his feet down. “Fun police.”

“Sorry I don’t want your legs broken.”

“Yeah, you fuckin’ should be,” Tommy mutters, before looking back down at his phone.
“Why is Twitter broken?”

“Uh,” Wilbur appears to be thinking for a moment, “Probably the interview, Techno smirked and for some reason people lost their minds.”

Tommy gags, “Ew.”

“Yup. You’re telling me, fucker looks like he’s in pain.”

Tommy nods, “Techno always looks like he’s in pain.”

Wilbur laughs and they stop at some traffic lights.

He scrolls through social media for a bit as Wilbur drives. It’s more normal driving now, and Tommy feels like he’s not going to crash anytime soon. (Although, he isn’t completely sure that they won’t crash.)

The drive is quiet, Wilbur hums to the songs on the radio and Tommy taps his foot as the car drives through Upper L'Manburg, it chugs along and there's an easy sort of silence around the pair of them.

Until Tommy, who is objectively stupid opens his mouth. "Why did... you... kick Theseus off that roof?" He asks and Wilbur freezes.

Tommy watches him go through ten stages of grief (doubling the normal amount) and Wilbur opens his mouth, closes it and looks... pained.

"Because I'm a fucking idiot," Wilbur manages, voice barely shaking, but still shaking just enough that Tommy can pick it up. "I... yeah, I'm really fucking stupid. That's why."

"Right," Tommy draws the word out, "I already knew that Wilbur."

Wilbur sighs, it's tired. "I... don't have a good reason Tommy, it was a mistake. It's a long story, and one that I'm not tellin' you today."

"Rightio," Tommy sighs and leans back into his seat.

A beat of silence.

"Do you regret it?"

"Yes."

"Are you sorry?"

“Are you gonna fucking Tweet my apology to Theseus, you hate him as much as I do.”

Tommy pauses, glancing up from his phone. “You hate Theseus?”

Wilbur’s shoulders hunched up, his entire body seemed to tense out.

He didn’t answer.

Damn. Okay then.

“You hate Theseus,” Tommy says, “Like... hate. If he was on fire and you had a bucket of water you’d tip it out next to him? Or... if you saw him bleeding out you’d turn around and leave him there.”

“I-” Wilbur manages, eyes still on the road, refusing to meet Tommy’s glare. “Don’t think so...”

“Think so?” Tommy repeats, eyes about the size of dinner plates. “You... think you wouldn’t let an innocent person die.”

“Vigilantes aren’t innocent,” Wilbur took a deep breath, “We’re not talking politics in the car.”

“Lives aren’t politics!” Tommy yells, only regretting it slightly, still he slapped his hand over his mouth.

Wilbur sighs, and glances at Tommy for a split second. “You’re right. They aren’t. Most of us in the tower call vigilantes politics... no one’s existence is politics. Sorry.”

Tommy huffs and shuffles down in his seat more, he doesn't say it was alright, because it isn't. But Wilbur seemed to understand that and he also stays quiet, the two of them listening to the music but with less enthusiasm.

The rest of the drive was quiet.

Until they pull up to the front of the apartment and Wilbur screws up his nose again.

“Look at your backseat,” Tommy deadpans, opening the door and clambering out of the car.
“Look, at least my apartment is clean.”

That's a lie. The apartment was a mess.

“I doubt that.”

Tommy laughs, with the slightest eyeroll and gives Wilbur a wave. “Well, see you Wilbur.”
Then he slams the car door shut.

He gets into the apartment.

It's oddly quiet.

Ranboo had today off.

Tommy pauses, “Ranboo?”

It's silent.

“Ranboo?” It’s slightly more desperate, “Ranboo I swear to Prime. If you’re messing with me I’m going to put spaghetti in your cereal.”

Still silent. The TV crackled and outside a tree rustled.

Tommy fell quiet, his hand darting to his phone. He grabs it and shoots Ranboo a text.

He waits for the ding.

It dings.

Ranboo’s phone is on the couch, buried by a bunch of pillows.

“Fuck,” Tommy says.

The phone stares back at him.

Great. Ranboo’s been kidnapped again.

There’s a whimpering noise.

Tommy pauses, and whirls around to that noise.

Nothing’s there.

He may be going crazy.

“Ranboo?”

There’s another whimper.

From the bathroom.

And Tommy realises that he’s a fucking idiot.

He basically runs over to the bathroom door and knocks on it, “Ranboo?”

There’s a noise as his response. Tommy relaxes against the door and simply wants to pass out from how relieved he is that Ranboo hasn’t been kidnapped. (It happened once, no more repeats of that, thank you.)

“You okay, Ranboo?”

There’s a retching noise.

Ah. Fantastic.

Another retching noise and Tommy sighs. He doesn’t mind at all, he’s had his own nights where he’s sitting on the bathroom floor vomiting and his friends have been there for that. It’s more that it’s... four-thirty in the afternoon and Ranboo has been struggling for six days now.

That’s a long time for everyone.

Tommy’s tired, not as tired as Ranboo must be, but still tired.

He knocks on the door, “Ranboo, I will kick down the door, I need to know how bad it is.”

“Not great,” Ranboo whines.

“How much vomit?”

“Like... a lot?”

“Thanks for that certainty...” Tommy sighs and tries to open the door, it’s locked and Tommy raps on the door again. “Let me in, I thought you were kidnapped, I am willing to bust this door down.”

“Don’t,” Ranboo groans, “I’m fine.”

Ranboo is a liar.

Tommy sighs and knocks on the door again, the plan is to annoy Ranboo into not being a bastard and getting his shit together. He knocks again and Ranboo groans, perhaps he’d swear if he was someone who swore. But Ranboo does not swear, so Tommy gets the privilege of annoying the fuck outta him.

He knocks again.

Ranboo makes a noise, it’s a mix between a sigh and a groan.

The door clicks and Tommy opens it.

It's not a pretty sight, Ranboo is essentially hugging the toilet, sitting in a way that can't be comfortable. The bathroom is small at best of times, and can barely fit one person in it, let alone two.

But they make it work.

Tommy screws up his nose and steps so they both have at least some room. Which works better than he thought it would, and now they both have a bit of room.

He crouches down, next to Ranboo who looks up at him. He looks exhausted, there are unshed tears in his eyes, and snot on his sleeve, and a couple of tear stains on his sleeves too. Good, no scarring.

With a sigh, Tommy puts a hand on Ranboo's forehead. "You don't seem to have a fever."

"Bad dream," Ranboo manages and leans into the touch slightly. They've never been a very touchy friend group, and the fact that Ranboo leans into it says a lot. "Very bad dream."

"Ah shit," Tommy mutters and runs a hand through Ranboo's hair who relaxes at the touch. The white side of his hair has always been softer, and no one can figure out why. "You alright?"

Ranboo moves a shoulder in response and Tommy sighs.

"You could've called me home, I really don't mind."

"It was fine," Ranboo says, "I've calmed down more."

Tommy draws his hand away from Ranboo's hair and rolls his eyes at his friend. He settles so that he's sitting next to the toilet, his back against the wall.

"Talk about it if you want," Tommy says lazily, his eyes half-closed, "Or not. I'll be here anyway."

Ranboo nods, and retches again, but he doesn't actually vomit anything up. He grips onto the toilet. "Did I tell you what happens? Like... just before fights."

"No," Tommy looks at his friend, who's a bit of a mess, but so is he honestly. He pauses, giving Ranboo a moment to collect himself.

"It's... bad," Ranboo mumbles, turning his face so he's looking at Tommy. "My first fight. One of two... I-" Ranboo pauses and takes a deep breath, turning his head and rubbing it on his sleeve.

Tommy just nods, and pats Ranboo on the back.

"And... I got pretty badly hurt," Ranboo's breathing is slightly shaky and Tommy nods as he listens. "I think things got broken, I don't really know it's just kinda a blur of pain and me being barely awake. Just a lot of pain, y'know."

Tommy does know a lot of pain, so he nods.

Ranboo sighs, "And... they waited until I was awake... and healed and I felt better, I felt so much better," he runs a hand through his hair and looks at Tommy, something just... so, so sad in his eyes. "And... they handed me a knife and told I'd have to lose the tail or my life-"

Tommy slaps his hands over his mouth, and doesn't care that his eyes fill with tears.

What the fuck?

What the everloving fuck?

A hot rage fills him, and considering the way the wall cracks behind his back... he takes a deep breath and tries to control himself.

He doesn't need the apartment blowing up. Not today.

Ranboo takes a deep breath and wipes at his eyes. "And... I grabbed the knife and my tail... and then they kept it-" Ranboo's voice breaks, "They fucking kept it as a prize."

Something smashes next to Tommy, and he jumps. The mirror shattered into pieces.

Tommy doesn't care too much about the mirror, he instead looks at Ranboo.

Ranboo sniffles and rubs at his face. "Can I have a hug?"

With a nod, Tommy grabs Ranboo and wraps him in a tight hug. Ranboo sniffles and Tommy hugs him tight.

He wishes that he could take away some of Ranboo's pain, and hugs him like he could hug the pain from Ranboo's body and into his own.

It's slightly awkward, they're both on the bathroom floor. It smells like vomit and Ranboo is doing that thing where he cries but not quite because there aren't tears.

Tommy has seen Ranboo cry with tears once. Soon after the three of them saved each other, Ranboo had been the most put together for about a month or two. He'd kept it together, until he just broke down crying.

That had been painful to watch.

But still, Tommy just holds Ranboo as he cries or as close as he can get without his biology getting in the way.

They stay like that for a while.

Tubbo returns from school.

They make dinner.

Tommy sighs, sitting at the table, stabbing at his spaghetti. He looks at Tubbo, then at Ranboo whose hands are still shaking ever-so slightly.

“Give me the address. I’m contacting The Blade.”

Tubbo nods, and opens the laptop, like he’s expecting that. He pauses, writes something down on a piece of paper and hands it to Tommy.

“It’s an abandoned warehouse,” Tubbo says, in his other hand he’s holding the Theseus googles and smiling. “Keep your ear-piece in for once. Okay big man?”

Tommy takes the goggles and sighs.

He needs to get a message to Techno.

That's how he ends up hanging off the side of the tower, tapping on the windows to see which ones open. Not a lot of them are open, which makes sense, the tower is supposed to have top security.

Lots of people have enhancements that can get them up this high.

Tommy taps on a window, and it shifts.

He pauses.

Before peering in.

It's Techno's office, very empty.

With Floof sitting on the desk.

Floof looks at him and tilts his head.

Tommy presses a finger to where his mouth would be (if the mask wasn't there), and slides the window up.

Floof stares at him and yaps happily.

"Shhh," Tommy says, careful that no one will hear him. Especially not the cameras as he slides in through the window. He shakes out his hands, before going through Techno's draws.

Hopefully Techno keeps blue-tack somewhere.

Techno's draws are incredibly boring, with reports and pens making up the majority of it. The only exciting thing in it is a photo. It's a blurry photo, that's for sure, one that Tommy can barely make out without holding towards his face.

He holds it towards his eyes, it's a photo with three boys in them. One of them has pink hair, maybe Techno. He looks... angry, he's smiling in the photo, but it's blurry and there's something more unhinged under there.

The boy on his left has black hair and concerningly pale skin, with a beanie... that has an animal on the beanie that he can't make out with the blur and the low light of the office. The boy on the right is glaring at the camera, and is wearing a bright green t-shirt and looks pretty bloody.

Tommy stares at it for a moment, before turning it over in his hands. On the back is writing, it's scribbled and very messy. He looks at it for a longer moment.

Don't die. I found this somewhere, get some closure.

It isn't signed

Tommy stares, before shoving it back in the draw and finding the blue tack that he was desiring. He pulls a bit out and sticks it on the back of the note that he wrote, with the pen.

Taking a deep breath, he opens the door to Techno's office and swings it open. So that he can stand in the doorway, and slam the door closed if he needs to.

He sticks the note to the door, it's anticlimactic to say the least.

Floof barks.

Tommy jumps and looks to face him, giving his best ‘wtf Floof?’ Look as he can, he pauses and waits to hear anything. When he hears nothing he sighs, giving Floof another glare and Floof barks again.

“Oi, Techno-”

Tommy freezes.

He looks up, at Wilbur.

Wilbur’s mouth is half-open. “Oh. You’re not Techno.”

Tommy nods slowly, and takes a step back. He is not risking this with Wilbur, not again. Wilbur can be as soft as he wants with Tommy, that doesn’t mean that Wilbur won’t kick him out a window again.

“Hello, Theseus.”

Tommy’s hand darts to the bat at his side.

Wilbur raises his hands and shakes his head, “I’m not going to hurt you...” he takes a few steps back down the hallway. “Unless you initiate, but I’m doubtful that you’re going to do that.”

He shuffles back.

Floof yaps.

Wilbur pulls a face, and takes a few more steps back. "I'm sorry." Is what he stammers out, and Tommy doesn't know if this is more for him, or more for Wilbur. "I... I am so sorry, I know that doesn't mean jackshit but... I really am sorry. There's a reason. I- there's a reason... but, I- it's not a good reason. I'm sorry, for what it's worth but- yeah."

Tommy nods, and takes a step back.

Wilbur looks at the note on the door.

Tommy freezes.

He does not need Wilbur the vigilante hater there.

"I won't be there," Wilbur says and takes a few more steps back. He seems about just as nervous as Tommy feels. "Just... stay safe I guess."

Tommy nods and stumbles back so that he's basically out the window. Floof yaps at him, and while Tommy doesn't want to kick Floof, he does want Floof to shut the fuck up before... Phil shows up on something.

Wilbur nods slowly, and steps forward. He grabs onto the door handle and basically flings the door closed.

Tommy stands there for a moment longer than he needs to, he adjusts his goggles and mask. Grabbing on to the side of the door, Floof yaps at him and Tommy's already halfway out the window.

He hangs onto the windowsill for a bit, grappling hook at the ready as he relaxes. He gets the window closed with a soft click and relaxes before firing the grappling hook to the building next to him.

That's how at 10pm (okay... maybe slightly later) he's dragging himself back up the tower. Because he's a dramatic fuckhead who wanted to meet Techno on top of a roof, because nothing bad has ever happened on a roof.

Nope.

Never,

Nothing bad has happened on a roof to Tommy, especially when heroes are involved.

Panting, he manages to haul himself onto the slightly curved, but still flat side of the building. For what it's worth, this is the roof, Tommy lays on the ground, trying to catch his breath desperately.

"You're late," the ever-so familiar voice of Techno deadpans. "Ten minutes late, can you please warn me if you're going to leave an ominous note and then be late."

Tommy gives a thumbs up, still from laying down and Techno huffs.

"In my defence," Tommy signs, "There was a mugging I had to attend to and that went a lot longer than I thought it would."

Techno snorts and rolls his eyes. He's not wearing his pig-skull, he's holding it instead. While he's wearing the red cape that's basically become most of his brand, it doesn't look like it's fastened on very well.

"So," Techno drawls and sits down.

Tommy narrows his eyes from under the mask.

“You said you found information?”

With a nod, Tommy fumbles around in his pocket and finds the piece of paper from earlier. “My guy found this address.”

Techno snatches the piece of paper and looks at it for a long moment. “Isn’t that one of Schlatt’s warehouses?”

Tommy shrugs. Who the fuck is Schlatt?

“Who?”

“Some business man,” Techno signs back, “He’s slightly sketchy... with tax evasion and stuff.” Techno sighs this time, “I did not think he’d be involved in this.”

“Maybe he’s not?”

Techno shrugs, looking at the piece of paper again. “Did you find anything else?”

“Two names.” Tommy signs and Techno raises an eyebrow for him to continue. *“Squid and Fruit.”*

He nods, Techno nods and sighs, “Right. So I’m guessing we’re going there. What can I expect?”

“You know enough sign?” Tommy looks at Techno, he does not want to be rambling in sign if Techno can’t even understand it.

Techno gives a nod.

“So. Normally there are lots of guards, so sneaking in is the best way. When we’re in rooms go back to back, people jump out of the darkness. Destroy any files we find...” Tommy pauses and looks at Techno.

Techno nods.

“Basically listen to me, and we should be good. It may be empty. It may not.” Tommy suppresses a sigh and looks at Techno. *“You got that?”*

“Yes,” Techno signs back and stands up, moving so that his bones pop and Tommy winces at that.

Tommy nods and stands up, cracking his neck and Techno pulls a face at that.

He grabs his grappling hooks and smiles under his mask. He gestures out across the city with his grappling hook, hoping that Techno gets the clue that he’s ready for whatever this will be.

Techno looks at Tommy... “I- don’t have a grappling hook.”

Tommy gives him a look.

Techno shuffles slightly. “Normally I’m with... Philza, he can fly and Wilbur’s always been pretty good in the air... his coat’s kind of like a hang glider.”

Tommy sighs and gestures at Techno who walks over. Techno seems to get the clue and grabs onto Tommy. It’s a slightly awkward hug situation, Tommy shakes out his arms and legs.

Holding the grappling hook, they zoom across the sky.

The buildings become a blur, and Tommy uses small sparks of red to keep them on course. Techno doesn't make a noise the entire way, and if it wasn't for the added weight, Tommy would think he's dead.

Techno eventually makes a noise, but over the wind it doesn't sound like much. He makes another noise and Tommy actually attempts to hear him this time. "It's there!" Techno yells and waves a hand wildly at the ground.

He shrieks and grabs Tommy again.

Tommy takes a deep breath and looks at Techno.

Then they start falling.

Techno starts screeching like a banshee as they plummet towards the ground. Although the wind takes most of the frantic screaming and Tommy grins, suppressing laughter as they fall.

At the last second, when Techno is gripping onto Tommy for dear life, and more than ready to twist them so that Tommy hits the ground first. He throws out his hand, and a shower of red sparks explode around them.

Tommy times it so he sends a burst of red magic at the ground and they bounce up in the air again. But much lower than what they were... a trick taught to him by Slimecicle, the man himself.

They bounce for a bit and Techno is breathing like he just ran a marathon.

Eventually they stop bouncing and Tommy lets go of Techno, who is hunched over and half-leaning against a wall. Techno pants, before looking up at Tommy. "Are you fucking crazy?"

Tommy nods.

Techno mutters under his breath and leans back against the wall. “We could’ve died.”

“*We didn’t.*” Tommy signs back with a grin under the mask.

Techno catches his breath, leaning against the wall and probably glaring at Tommy. His earpiece crackles, and Tubbo’s breathing (which is way too loud) bursts into his ear, somehow Tommy doesn’t squeal (and give away his identity) instead he just jumps.

“Reporting for duty!” Tubbo yells into his ear and Tommy flinches. “Wait I’ll turn myself down...” he says and there’s the noise of a keyboard clattering on the other end. “That should be better.” He says much quieter.

Tommy nods, even though Tubbo can’t see him. “I’ll be doing my homework,” Tubbo mutters, “Might not be paying much attention. Good luck, hit the panic button if you need it and get the cops there.”

He gets the same spiel everytime, Tommy knows the drill.

Tapping his fingers against the wall, Techno shoots up and looks at him. Gesturing over his shoulder they start towards the door.

“Through the door?” Techno asks, voice unsure. “Is that the best idea?”

Tommy shakes his head and points up. Piping litters the wall all the way up to the roof, assuming that they can find a way in up there, that’s what they’re going to do. (If they can’t then Tommy will break a window or something.)

Putting his hands on the pipes he starts to clamber up. It’s a practiced skill, but for someone who’s been practicing since before he could walk properly. He’s up on the roof quickly, and

Techno is beside him.

Well that was quick.

“You’re quick.” Tommy signs and Techno makes a laughing noise from under the pig mask.

“I grew up here.” Techno signs back, like it explains everything and... it kinda does.

The roof is flat, and Tommy walks around the edges, before seeing a huge hole in the building. It’s about the size of a dumpster and... he’s curious about it, he glances at Techno.

He’s also staring at the dumpster sized hole.

Techno makes a noise. “That’s where that dumpster went!”

Tommy looks at him.

“Phil threw a dumpster last time a villain attacked,” Techno mutters and peers into it. “That’s where it went. We looked for it... for a while.”

“Well, that’s our way in.” Tommy signs and peers over. There’s a couple of beams holding up the roof, they slip in across those and walk across them to find what they need.

Notice how many guards there are. Take them out. See what there is, and find out the next steps from there. Tommy grabs Techno and points at the beams that criss-cross across the roof.

Techno seems to nod.

Tommy responds by grabbing onto his arm and swinging into the building, for a moment he adjusts to the light and blinks behind his goggles.

Scanning for anything he waits, Techno's next to him, gripping onto the bar above and sighing, slightly less balanced than Tommy and Tommy looks around the room.

It's an open room, really just a warehouse. With boxes piled up around them, boxes that Tommy doesn't trust for some reason. There are cages piled up in the corner of the room, which are standing there proudly.

Tommy stares at the cages.

Then the blood on the floor around them.

Techno stiffens up next to him, and goes to say something. Tommy shakes his head.

"Why are there cages?"

"We think they're hiring out fighters."

Techno somehow freezes more at that, and he takes a deep breath. *"Right."* He signs back, before shuffling so that he's sitting on the beam, feet dangling in the air and swinging back and forth.

Tommy scans again, this place is empty and for the life of him, Tommy can not think of a reason why all the information led here. There's... nothing here worth looking at, it's empty.

In a bold and incredibly stupid move, Tommy drops to the ground.

It's quiet, and Techno makes a noise.

Tommy presses his finger to his lips, although it has to look quite dumb with his mask on. He turns around, pulling out his baseball bat and holding it up, ready to swing.

The warehouse is quiet, apart from the odd metal creaking around them and the odd noise outside. A car driving past, a motorbike, a siren in the distance, an assortment of noises that weren't loud enough for Tommy to be concerned.

He walks forwards, holding the bat up and scanning for anything.

Whipping around a corner he sees... vials. Vials filled with blue, blue... liquid that makes Tommy's stomach drop and an illogical panic jump through his veins. He takes a deep breath.

For a moment longer he stares.

Glass is on the ground, but there's still enough of it that it could cause... so much damage to so many people.

"Blue." Techno says.

Tommy jumps and swings his bat on reflex, Techno takes a step back.

"Why's there blue here?"

"You know what blue is?"

“I wasn’t born under a rock,” Techno adds, and looks at the vials and the blue shimmering liquid. “This stuff is a death trap.”

Tommy nods, and takes a small step forward. Techno puts a hand on his shoulder and shakes his head. “Leave it.”

“We gotta destroy it,” Tommy signs in return and steps forward.

Techno picks him up and puts him back on the ground. “No,” he snaps, “We’re not even touching that stuff.”

Tommy shifts on his feet, and looks up at Techno.

Techno looks back down at him, not faltering. “No.”

“I’ll be fine.”

“I don’t think you know what that stuff actually does to you.”

Tommy pushes past Techno and Techno responds by picking him up by the back of the hoodie. He kicks his legs for a moment as Techno holds the back of his hoodie.

If Tommy could, he’d be swearing like crazy right now.

He kicks his legs again, trying to kick Techno but to no avail.

“You done?” Techno asks.

Tommy is not.

He kicks again for a while, until his legs are tired and he misses being on the ground.

Techno puts him back down on the ground.

Tommy turns around to Techno and flips him off.

Then Tommy lunges for the blue.

Techno tackles him.

“No way!” Techno says and a box crashes around them. “Are you addicted or something kid?”

“*Destroy,*” He manages to sign in front of Techno’s face in an attempt to get him away. Techno flinches away for a moment and that’s enough for Tommy to flip Techno over and run to the vials on the boxes.

He picks them up and they shatter against the ground.

Techno makes a pained noise. “You really don’t know what that can do, do you?”

Tommy ignores him, instead crushing the glass under his feet. It crunches and Tommy twists his foot as he does so, while looking at Techno who looks extremely pained.

For a moment Tommy stares at the blue liquid that’s on the floor... the colour is very nice, it shimmers against the floor and the pale lights that he barely noticed throughout all of this. It’s like water...

He tears his eyes away, and back at Techno.

Techno pinches the bridge of his nose, mask off and in his hand. "I swear... I am going to throw you off a roof."

"Been there, done that." Tommy signs and Techno snorts. *"By your co-worker."*

Techno snorts again, and looks around. "There's nothing here... apart from that," he gestures at the glass on the ground. "That's not enough to make any arrests."

Tommy huffs, it's quiet and the only proper noise he's made so far. Hopefully that didn't give Techno any idea, because that would be a dumb way to be revealed. Ideally it was some dramatic thing that would be the great ending to a movie.

He looks around... there will be files somewhere, he can feel it. Files with names and dates and ages on them, files that he's going to burn to the ground.

Scanning around the room, he sees the crates easily. They're always this size, slightly smaller and always slightly open from someone meddling. Tommy didn't hesitate to throw the crate open.

Papers filled it.

Techno looks amazed. "How?"

Tommy ignores him and reaches into his pocket, he pulls out a match box and sets it alight. He throws it into the crate, and does that for the next one.

Techno stares at the fire in the same way that Tommy stared at the blue on the ground. His eyes are wide, and lit by the fire that's burning through the crates too.

“Why?” Techno asks and Tommy resists the urge to complain.

If he had known that Techno was going to ask so many questions. Then he wouldn't have fucking done anything.

“Governments take advantage of these files,” Tommy signs and Techno doesn't look too shocked, instead he nods. “Not letting that happen on my watch.”

Techno nods again, and looks around. “Shouldn't we read the files?”

Tommy stops looking at the fire.

Then looks back, which is honestly his response. Techno seems to deflate at that, but Tommy ignores it for instead looking at the charred inside of the boxes and the ashes of the papers that were inside.

Techno rolls his eyes, and walks away, footsteps echoing around the warehouse.

It's oddly quiet.

Tommy freezes. Most warehouses have alarm systems, especially ones that hold important information... and Blue. The most expensive drug on the market... no one in their right mind would just leave it out.

He freezes.

This was too easy.

It's all been too easy.

Tommy slams his hand against the crate, and Techno doesn't move.

Techno doesn't move.

That shouldn't be as terrifying as it is.

Tommy opens his mouth, to say something, to scream, because Techno is scaring him right now.

He's staring at a part of the warehouse just out of Tommy's view like it's the end of his world.

An arrow flies overhead, and lands in the crate next to him.

Tommy jumps and pulls out his baseball bat.

On top of a pile of crates is a man, he has black straight hair that looks... honestly a bit greasy and unwashed. Tommy's no style icon, but seriously... washed hair that's the bare minimum.

He's holding a bow... (people still used those?) And a quiver of arrows thrown over his back. He smiles down at Tommy.

"Hey kid."

Tommy doesn't say anything, instead grabbing his bat and holding it up and ready to swing at whatever the fuck he needs.

The man... although he doesn't look too old, in his twenties maybe. Maybe about Techno's age, maybe a bit older. He grins and holds the bow, and Tommy takes a few steps backwards, fumbling for his bat.

"C'mon kid, things aren't that easy for you... for anyone really. We knew that you were the biggest risk, you got a history of taking down these places. Set up some clues, and now you're here with a superhero, this could not have worked better."

Tommy just stares. Who the fuck is this guy?

"Oh yeah, you polite folk like introductions. Nestorio, I'm the person who's about to kill you or die trying." He gives a bright smile and Tommy waves back with the same fake cheer. "Cool, now I'm going to shoot at you."

Oh shit.

Tommy dives behind a crate, which explodes around him as an arrow hits it...

Okay. Those certainly aren't normal arrows.

He takes a deep breath, before spinning around and balling the energy in his hands. Firing it at Nestorio (what sort of fucking name is that?)

It hits and there's a cry out as Nestorio tumbles to the ground.

Tommy takes the moment to breathe, before sprinting around the piles of crates stacked in the middle of the warehouse.

Something makes a noise around him... like metal against metal.

The back of his brain notices Nestorio, standing up and holding a knife... a knife that shimmers against the low light of the warehouse.

Tommy watches it fly across the room.

And lodges itself in Tommy's stomach.

Oh. Oh shit.

So... he's been stabbed in the stomach.

He stares at the knife in a morbid curiosity, it's not hurting.

There's a knife in his stomach.

"Huh," is what Tommy says and looks at it, before looking up.

Techno's standing there, mask on the ground. Frozen.

His mouth is open, and his eyes are wide.

In front of him is a man... wearing a blue suit, arms out in what Tommy would call a beckoning gesture for a hug.

Techno shakes his head and steps back a little bit. His hands are shaking.

That scares Tommy more than it should.

Tommy summons as much energy as he aims it at the man in the blue suit. He releases it and it fires at the man in the suit.

Tommy grabs Techno who doesn't quite seem in it at the moment. He hides behind a crate, holding onto Techno's shirt and looking at him.

His eyes are far away, and he's shaking. He's muttering something that Tommy can't quite make out, but it seems almost pleading.

Fuck.

Tommy glances down at his stomach, yup, the knife is still there. He's not in pain, but that might not stay that way for a while.

There's laughter behind them, a low, chuckling laughter that echoes throughout the warehouse and Tommy latches onto Techno, putting an arm around his shoulders as Techno trembles.

Tommy shakes him slightly, Techno recoils in on himself and he makes a noise. It's a broken noise and so... unsettling coming from him.

"Techno," Tommy says, voice shaking slightly from disuse. He doesn't care if he gives himself away, it's Techno... he won't care. "Techno, are you there?"

A blank stare.

Holy shit, holy shit, holy fucking dog shit.

What the fuck is he supposed to do?

Techno's shaking, not responding and apparently not in the present day. There are at least two people trying to kill them and... Tommy has no clue what to do.

He puts both hands on his head.

Think. He needs to think. There has to be something he can do.

"Theseus!" Nestorio calls out and Tommy hates the way he flinches. "Now, we have a fun little game. You give up Techno, and you can go free... it's not like he's going to notice."

Tommy pauses.

He hates the way he thinks about it.

Techno wouldn't know... well he would eventually, but not right now. Techno is so out of it that Tommy could just... hand over Techno.

He'd get to go home, and... laugh with Tubbo and Ranboo over a movie which was badly acted and live his best life. Maybe he'd deal with the PR of his own actions and then get a promotion or something.

If Techno was handed over... he could get the knife out of his stomach, the knife that isn't hurting right now, but it's going to.

He was stabbed... in the stomach, a pretty vital area.

Techno would know that Theseus handed him over... he wouldn't know that Tommy handed him over and everything would be fine. Sure, he'd have three heroes with a personal vendetta against him...

Tommy looks at Techno, he's not shaking anymore, but his eyes are unfocused and he is somewhere completely different...

He wants to go home.

So Tommy shoves Techno out into the open.

Someone makes a noise, and it sounds surprised. Like Tommy wouldn't shove Techno out into people that seem like his worst fears so that Tommy could get away and get a stomach out of his knife.

Tommy peers over the top of the crate.

Techno has been forced onto his knees, his head's been yanked back and the man in the blue suit has a pair of scissors which he's snipping next to Techno's ear.

Techno doesn't seem to notice, his eyes aren't there.

"What the fuck?" Nestorio says, "You sold him out so quickly."

Tommy nods over the crate, and starts looking around for something that can get him out of this. He has a knife in his stomach (still), he can use that to throw at something. Throw it at Nestorio... distract the suit guy and then send energy at him.

Okay.

That'll work.

Then he can leave. Techno can... figure it out.

He's a hero. Who hasn't been stabbed in the stomach, he probably has a panic button or something. He'll figure this one out.

All Tommy has to do is distract them for a moment and book it the fuck out of there.

Tommy takes a deep breath and nods to himself.

There's a snipping noise, and silence around them.

The braid, that is Techno's hair, is currently dangling in front of his face.

It's silent for a long moment.

Tommy's heart jumps into his throat.

Techno makes a noise that sounds like a sob being strangled out of him.

Okay... Tommy is not leaving Techno to figure this out. Fuck it.

The braid is thrown at the ground and for a long moment Techno just stares at it, a broken expression on his face.

Time to throw the knife.

The knife in his stomach.

Tommy winces, grabbing the handle of the knife.

He pulls, and throws it in one motion. It clatters behind them, and the man in the blue suit jumps, Nestorio jumps as well, but has an arrow out quicker than Tommy can react.

And the arrow is pointed straight at the back of Techno's head.

Nestorio's hands are steady as he points the arrow, not the slightest tremor in them.

"In what world would that work?" Nestorio says calmly... almost too calmly. Huh. That's something to work with. "Nice try, Theseus... too bad you both have to die here."

Tommy does not have to die here.

He will not die here.

Neither will Techno.

They're both making it out alive.

The stomach wound aches, and Tommy ignores the red that's starting to cover his hands, or that he looks like something dragged straight from the depths of the Earth's. He feels like it too.

Tommy grits his teeth.

His power is a finicky thing, with lots of possibility.

He holds his hands up, and gets into a fighting stance.

Energy swirls in his hands, in his blood, he can feel it about to burst, about to just... destroy everything in his path. However, he holds it. That hurts and Tommy makes the noise to prove so.

Then he lets go.

And Nestorio falls to the ground, the ground cracking underneath him.

Tommy takes a deep breath, he shouldn't be dead. Just a density shift... those aren't too bad if not done from too high up.

The man in the blue suit stands there, a wide... unsettling grin on his face as he walks forwards. Tommy walks backwards, not even thinking about using his powers and scrambling backwards.

"Ha." The blue-suit man laughs. "You're like all the other fuckin' vigilantes. You complain that you're not bein' treated like heroes, but throw each other under the bus like it's nothin'."

Tommy doesn't say anything... he's not wrong.

"Two heroes... being left behind by two vigilantes who had their own self interests in mind."

Tommy staggers backwards... where's his bat? He must've dropped it somewhere.

The man in the suit stops, "Go," he says, "Go and be free... go to fight another day and throw someone else under the bus. Go, otherwise I'm beatin' the shit out of you."

Tommy doesn't move.

The man raises an eyebrow. "Alrigh' then. Step forward."

He steps forward. Chin up high, and looks at the man in the suit.

The man grins, forms a fist and... swings.

Pain shoots through Tommy's nose, tears spring to his eyes and his stomach turns over as he crashes to the ground. Hands on his nose and tucking his head in as he hits the ground with a thump.

A thump that makes his ribs cry out.

Ouch. That's gonna leave a mark.

Tommy groans, he deserves this. He's not... mad that it's happening but... fuck it hurts.

The suited man grabs him by the hair, yanking him upwards and slamming him against the ground. Something cracks and pain shoots through his lungs.

Not again.

He tries his powers.

Nothing, a spark to his side.

Fuck.

He's picked up again, his hair yanked at.

This time he scrambles to try get a grip, to try and figure out something.

Instead he's thrown into the ground again.

Something else cracks and Tommy lets out a strangled scream, muffled by the mask. But still a scream.

He's bleeding, his ribs... aren't right, something's pierced and breathing is like a challenge, an obstacle which he needs to overcome to try and fucking survive.

Part of his brain knows he deserves this, he was going to leave Techno... he's hurt so many people. The other, desperate part of his brain claws for survival, the part he's never been quite able to silence. Even when he was a child.

He's picked up again, by the hair again and slammed against a wall.

He coughs, it's a wet cough and there's blood droplets on the inside of his mask. He can feel it.

"Fuck," Tommy manages.

The man in the suit smiles, he yanks Tommy up off the ground and Tommy almost screams at the movement.

He laughs... the suit man with a knife in his hand... when did that get there? And plunges it into Tommy's stomach. Tommy cries out.

"So long Theseus, you flew too close to the sun."

"Wrong... fuckin'... myth," Tommy grits out, and he's dropped against the wall.

Tommy wheezes, as he's slammed against the ground, his previous injuries creak at the contact.

He coughs, his face mask soaks with blood and he tries his hardest not to take it off.

His hands instinctively clutch at his stomach and he freezes when he finds himself soaked in blood.

Suddenly his injuries seem so much more painful and he has trouble breathing with the blood pooling in his mouth.

He brings his mask down as he doubles over, coughing and gagging as blood spills out and he lets out a scream at the change of position.

He breathes heavily, hands trembling in front of him, not knowing which wound he should hold onto first.

It hurts, it hurts so much more than when he fell off that fucking building.

He's going to die.

He sobs, giving himself a hug as he looks up for Techno. Where was he?

"Techno-" he coughs again, a sob forcing its way out of him as more blood pools around in his mouth.

He tries to stand, falling right back to the ground with a painful yell.

Instead, he tries crawling closer to the man, reaching a hand out "Techno- Techno, please! Please! Help, help me!" he sobs, his hand falling as he loses energy.

"I don't wanna die!" he cries out.

A bright red appears in the corner of his eyes, his eyes begging for him to just succumb to unconsciousness.

His vision starts to tilt and he can see two people in front of him, their faces are blurred out but he knows exactly who they are.

"I'm sorry," he gasps, eyes locked on the two figures "Please, I'm so sorry-" he puts his head on the floor to avoid looking at them "Don't hurt me, please, I'm sorry!"

He's going to die.

He's going to die.

He retches, his stomach spamming in an attempt to empty itself, the sight of his parents making him sick. The way it always has... and maybe always will.

"I need- I need Techno- I need to help- To help?" his mind starts to darken as confusion clouds his mind, the figures of his parents speaking in mumbles he can't quite hear.

Why are they here? They're supposed to be dead. They're dead.

Like he'll be soon.

Dead, dead, dead dead dead dead dead dead.

He cries out, anguish in his voice when he looks up to a dark room and Techno not there anymore.

He sobs, hugging himself once again.

He's alone.

He's going to die alone.

He doesn't wanna die.

“Techno!” He screams, his voice aching, and tearing itself up in a way that makes any noise, any word ache like agony. Tears jump to his eyes. “Techno!” He screams again, his voice breaking.

Nothing.

Please, please, he doesn't want to die alone. Not alone. Not alone, anything but alone. Not again.

He's so tired of being alone.

Raising his hand, he takes a deep breath that's like glass being forced down his throat and cutting at his vocal chords and windpipe.

Not alone.

Please... just... not alone.

“Techno!” He shrieks, “Please!”

Silence.

He sighs, leaning back into the dirty concrete.

One of the blurry faces... his parents look over him, and Tommy imagines their expressions are filled with disgust. “You can rest now,” a soft voice chimes, “Rest now Tommy, you've earned it.”

Not alone.

He can't die alone.

Please.

He doesn't want to die, please... please, please, please.

He doesn't want to die.

He's so tired.

Not alone.

He doesn't want to die.

Please.

He can't sleep, he'll never wake up if he sleeps...

More red flashes around him, that's him, he knows that's him.

He closes his eyes.

He's tired after all.

Chapter End Notes

No meme in this chapter, just angst. Cry about it ♥

Summary:

Wilbur gives Tommy a ride home so he can ditch work, Tommy makes fun of Wilbur for how dirty the backseat of his car is when they get in the car. They have a talk about Twitter and Tommy's roommates which then turns into an argument about how Wilbur hates Theseus and how "lives aren't politics" before Tommy is dropped off at his apartment.

The apartment is quiet and Tommy gets worried because Ranboo doesn't seem to be home, he's scared he's been kidnapped until he hears whimpering from the bathroom, he finds Ranboo vomiting in the bathroom. Tommy comforts him as Ranboo opens up about his past. During dinner Tommy demands the address they had found, saying he'd contact the Blade.

He gets to the tower, finds an open window and enters right into Techno's office, which is empty except for Floof, who yaps at him. Tommy looks for blue-tack in the drawers to leave a message, he finds a picture of Techno and two other people "The boy on his left has black and pale skin, with a beanie... that has an animal on the beanie that he can't make out with the blur and the low light of the office. The boy on the right is glaring at the camera, and is wearing a green t-shirt and looks pretty bloody." when he turns the picture over there's a message written, it's not signed. He puts it back in the drawer and finally finds blue-tack.

Right after he leaves the message he's found by Wilbur, who promises not to hurt him unless Theseus initiated. Wilbur apologizes, swearing there's a reason why he did what he did, he admits it's not a good one but apologizes nonetheless. When he sees the message left for Techno Wilbur swears he won't follow and let's Theseus go after wishing him well.

Later that night he returns to the tower, finding Techno already on the roof, he informs Techno of the address, finding out it's one of Schlatt's warehouses (Tommy is confused as to who that is, a businessman apparently). Tommy explains to Techno what to expect when they arrive at the warehouse and they leave the tower using Tommy's grappling hook.

They arrive at the warehouse, entering through a dumpster sized hole on the roof (apparently Phil did it). The room they look into is empty of people, boxes piled and cages with blood around them. Tommy is confused as to why all the information led

them there and drops into the room. It's completely silent except for a metal creaking and the outside world.

When he turns a corner he sees vials filled with blue, an extremely dangerous drug that can enhance and mutate people. Techno wants to leave it but Tommy insists on destroying it, which he does, much to Techno's distaste.

Tommy looks around to the crates and opens it to find a bunch of files which he immediately burns with the excuse that the government would take advantage of them.

Tommy then realizes that most warehouses have an alarm system and that it had been too easy. Techno is silent which scares Tommy and suddenly an arrow hits the crate next to him. When he looks up at a pile of crates he sees a man with slightly greased and unwashed hair (which, ew) who introduces himself as Nestorio. He hits Nestorio with a blast of energy, sending him to the ground.

Tommy is momentarily distracted by the sound of metal against metal and Nestorio throws a knife at him, which stabs Tommy in the stomach, oddly enough, it doesn't hurt.

When he looks at Techno he's just standing there frozen, eyes faraway, a man in a blue suit in front of him. Techno seems terrified which in turn makes Tommy terrified. Tommy grabs Techno and hides behind a crate. Techno isn't responding to Tommy no matter what he says.

Nestorio tells Theseus that if he hands in Techno he'd let him go, sating Techno wouldn't notice. And Tommy... considers it, thinking about being able to go home and be with his friends despite the consequences.

Tommy shoves Techno out in the open, which seems to surprise Nestorio. Tommy watches from behind the crate as Techno's braid gets cut off. Tommy decides he's not leaving Techno behind as he hears him sob.

He throws the knife previously in his stomach as a distraction and Nestorio points an arrow at Techno's head.

The man in blue gives him a chance to go, saying he'd beat him up otherwise, Tommy doesn't move. The man starts hitting Tommy, he just takes it, his powers not working.

Tommy lays on the floor in pain and starts begging for his life, asking Techno for help. His magic manifests and he sees his parents, he's on the brink of unconsciousness but fights it, knowing if he fell asleep, he wouldn't wake up again.

Tommy closes his eyes.

That Time Things Went Wrong

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Violence, passing out, injuries, depersonalization, dehumanising treatment, knives, weapons, near death experience(s).

This one is basically Techno's POV of last chapter, so most of the warnings from that chapter apply here. Please be careful! As always there is a chapter summary in the end notes, for both reminders and anyone who needs it.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Techno rolls his eyes at Theseus, watching him look at the ashes of previously existing files before turning and walking around the warehouse.

The warehouse is exactly what he thinks it was going to be. Empty, with boxes scattering the floor and Theseus who is around...

The first clue that pointed out that something was wrong were the footprints on the floor, the dust covered floor with two different pairs of footprints, one of them very obviously made by dress shoes, the other ones he couldn't quite tell.

He follows them with his eyes watching as they cut off by a pile of crates, there are no more footprints around.

He narrows his eyes at the footsteps, they looked fairly recent, not yet covered by another layer of dust, they are either from today or from yesterday. He hopes it's the latter.

The second clue is the jacket on top of the crates the footprints cut off by, a black suit jacket laid spread out on the crate, leaving the wood below it wet. Whoever the owner of it was had most likely left it there to dry after the rain.

Techno tenses at the sight of it, it was visibly damp and he's sure no one would ever leave an expensive jacket like this in a warehouse to dry.

The third and last clue were the noises around them, the loud sound of cars passing by on a road nearby and the music of a nightclub on the other side of the street being the loudest. But underneath that, he can hear light footsteps with the squeak of an obvious drag, they're extremely light, almost unnoticeable, the footsteps of someone who knows when and how to stay quiet.

He knows those footsteps.

He freezes and his breath stutters when recognition registers in his brain, shades of blue stained with red flash through his brain as he looks at the opening to another room, where the footsteps are coming from, and he waits.

He doesn't prepare his weapon, doesn't change his stance. He just waits with wide eyes and bated breath.

He sees brown, almost black eyes as a man in a blue suit rounds the corner and he can't look away.

There's a constant ringing in his ears, similar to when his voices start yelling at the same time, but tenfold. There's a faint sound from behind him, where someone he thinks he knows stands.

The eyes stare back at him and then they wrinkle when a wide grin spreads across the man's face. Techno, for the first time in years, wishes he knew what he was planning.

He looks almost exactly the same as he remembers, his blue suit is stained red.

You bled on him again!

That doesn't make sense. He's not injured, he hasn't even gotten more than 10 feet close to the man.

Apologize.

He closes his hands into tight fists, resisting the urge in his body to kneel down and beg for forgiveness. His hands are shaking, he can feel it.

The man takes a step closer to him and Techno flinches.

He doesn't wanna go back.

This shouldn't be happening.

They said this wouldn't happen again.

They promised.

They lied to him, they have him again and they said that they wouldn't let this happen no matter what. Everything's underwater, blurry, he can't hear anything apart from the sound of his own heart thumping in his chest like a drum.

Phil promised.

"Drop the mask," the man says, voice bright and cheery and Techno's dropped the mask before his brain can process what's happening.

The mask clatters against the floor, and Techno doesn't care.

Do what he says. Don't get yourself hurt.

He opens his arms, like he wants a hug.

Techno's brain manages to kick into gear, if only slightly and he stumbles back, shaking his head.

Not again. Not again.

They promised. They promised that this wouldn't happen. They said that he was dead.

"No." Techno says, it's barely a whisper. He shakes his head again.

Nothing is working, this wasn't supposed to happen. This was supposed to be him hanging out with Theseus and having suspicions confirmed, rather than... whatever this was. Techno opens his mouth.

He says nothing. His mouth is moving, maybe he is actually saying something, but he can't hear it. Like there's cotton in his ears, he can't think, he can't move.

It's him.

Him.

Something explodes in front of him, and there's rough arms dragging him. He barely notices it.

It's happening again.

He's sitting down.

It's happening again.

Terror. That's what it is. There's no fancy words, no flowery language to explain it. Just terror, flooding from his fingertips to his head, from anywhere to everywhere. Terror. Just terror, unfiltered terror.

He can't breathe.

He can't not breathe.

Everything's underwater, he can't hear, he can't... what's happening?

There's talking.

His ears are ringing but his vision is sharper than ever. He can see everything clearly.

The blood staining the walls, the monstrous bodies laying motionless, dead on the floor, the cages filled with scratches.

It's so familiar...

They said this wouldn't happen again, and that he'd never be here again.

He wants to sob.

Why is he here again?

He hears something hit metal and suddenly he's on his knees on the floor, unable to stand up, his leg isn't moving.

His leg is jammed, he knows that. He won't be able to run.

Something pulls at his hair and he freezes, then starts shaking his head frantically, muttering to himself.

His head is held in a strong grip, keeping it still.

Why is this so familiar?

His braid is pulled back.

Is he angry?

"Your hair is your pride." *he* holds his freshly cut hair in front of him, keeping his head still so he's forced to look "And this, this is a sign you're mine."

He's yanked to come face to face with his master's maniac grin "You're nobody, understand? You're weak! This-" his hair is held up again "is a sign of weakness!"

He's weak.

Weak, weak, weak, weak, weakweakweak.

He feels the weight of his braid vanish and he loses balance, now on his hands and knees.

He sees his braid being tossed in front of him and slowly brings a shaky hand up, feeling where it used to be, only to find uneven short hair and loose strands.

No.

Please no.

No no no no no no no.

He feels the familiar prick of a needle on the back of his neck but it was so brief it was like it never happened.

A sob leaves his body and he puts his head on the floor to ask his master for forgiveness.

Phil and Wilbur promised this wouldn't happen again.

They promised.

So why is this happening?

He's not a weapon.

He's not some creature used to do experiments with mutation.

But why does it feel like he is?

Techno doesn't manage to do any of those things, instead he shakes his head and doesn't even bother to wipe away the tears.

Again. It's happened again.

And he was lied to.

Vaguely he notices an arrow being pressed to the back of his skull, and he doesn't even flinch. It's just Nestor... Nestor isn't going to hurt him.

Right?

There's the noise of concrete smashing, a bright red flash of light. And Nestor groaning next to him.

There's more noises, and Techno doesn't process them. He knows that there are noises, and that's all. Not what they are.

"Hey," a voice says, he knows that voice... It's the voice that helped him train and the voice that hid with him when they stole bread, or refused to fight. "It's alright. I'm sorry-"

His mouth moves without his permission "You said it'd be okay..." his voice sounds small, childish, scratchy "You said they wouldn't hurt me this time." he sobs, little voice wobbling as he avoids looking at Nestor.

"Hey, c'mon, look at me. You know it's okay to."

Techno looks up, and the childish part of him shoves Nestor away and he scrambles back slightly. "Go away-"

"C'mon bud, look." he takes something out from inside the jacket he always wore. "I got you some bread." he holds it out for Techno to take.

Techno shrinks onto himself, hesitant to take the food basically being served to him on a silver platter. Only when his stomach growls loudly does he, albeit reluctantly, take it.

He takes pieces from the bread slowly, trying to savour the only food he's had in days. He almost shoves the whole thing in his mouth from how good it tastes, it's just stale bread but he almost feels himself crying over it.

Still, not even the food can lighten up the mood as he purposely looks away from Nestor, almost pouting at the continuous sting on his cheek and hands.

He eats in silence while Nestor looks around, waiting for Techno to start up a conversation.

Nestor finally speaks up after deciding Techno wouldn't do it, "I'm sorry he hit you."

Techno grips his food harder, the droplets of blood on his hands staining it "You said he wouldn't..."

"I know I did, I'm sorry, I was wrong." Techno sees Nestor looking at him from the corner of his eye, he refuses to look at him.

"It'll be okay, as long as I'm here, I'll take care of you, I'll never hurt you." Nestor smiles at him.

Techno can't help but to smile back, hope blooming in his chest, "Promise?"

Nestor holds out his pinkie, grinning "Of course!" they interlock pinkies "I wouldn't dream of it, I promise."

The warmth in his chest grows and he can't help but grin back, then, from somewhere in front of him he hears muffled voices yelling out.

It's faint, almost as if it isn't there. He looks up at Nestor, he doesn't seem to have noticed.

The man lets go of his pinkie, still smiling as he takes off his jacket.

The screaming is still there and Techno finds it hard to ignore "Do you hear that?"

"Hm?"

"Screaming."

"Screaming?" he looks up in silence, eyebrows furrowed in concentration "I don't hear anything, we're far from the arena so it's quite literally impossible that it'd be coming from there."

Techno tenses, barely acknowledging Nestor's words as the screaming gets louder and clearer, it sounds like a child's voice, screaming from pain, the voice is familiar but he's not sure he's ever heard it.

"Techno!"

His eyes widened at that, chest heavy with emotion.

Tommy?

His surroundings seem to melt around him and he's back to the warehouse, kneeling on the floor with a sharp pressure on the back of his head.

He tries to look up at where he knows Tommy is, his arms barely holding him up. The object at the back of his head presses harder.

"You don't wanna save him, Tech." Techno tenses at the nickname "He wants to leave you here, he wants you to die."

No, Tommy wouldn't do that. He wouldn't just throw him into a cage of lions to die.

"He's paying for it now, he tried to hurt you." Nestor adds.

Techno tries to move again, the pressure gets stronger once again, digging into his skull in a painful manner.

"I'm just protecting you, I won't hurt you, but he will." Techno's not sure if he's referring to Tommy or the ringmaster "Just come with us, I missed you, Tech. I promise you'll be safe with us."

Will he? Nestor had never been anything but kind to him, sure he got a bit rough with training but that was so he didn't get hurt during fights.

He considers it for a second, the cogs in his head turning with the adrenaline pumping through his veins.

"We're like brothers, Tech. Have I ever lied to you?"

Techno's posture hardens and he clenches his jaw, Anger coursing through his body like poison.

Yes, yes he had.

"Techno!" Tommy's shrieks bring his attention back "Please!" he sobs.

He moves quickly, bringing an arm up behind his head and snapping the arrow pointed at him in half, he feels Nestorio stumble away from him with a gasp, he ignores it in favor of trying to stand up.

When he does, he almost immediately falls back, right, jammed leg.

He curses to himself, he doesn't have time for this. He uses both hands to move the leg into a position where it at least works and stands back up, stumbling hurriedly towards Tommy.

He holds Tommy's face in his hands, his eyes are barely open and he looks like he's on the brink of unconsciousness.

He examines Tommy's state, not moving him around in fear of any major injuries.

There's a pool of blood on the floor and his nose and mouth are bleeding, his breathing is unsteady and raspy.

He needs Tommy to stay awake. He lightly taps the side of his face with shaking hands, urgency not hidden in his desperate attempts to wake Tommy up.

No response. His breathing is slowing down.

Despair fills his chest and his movements get more frantic “Tommy. Tommy!” he shakes the boy by the shoulders, he’d rather have him seriously injured than dead “Wake up! Please, Tommy, wake up!”

Tommy coughs and blood splatters on Techno’s neck, his voice gets louder as he calls out “Tommy!”

A raucous laugh fills the room “Please! The kid’s as good as dead! Let it happen too.”

That floods a quiet sort of terror through Techno. He what? Tommy. Tommy who argued about everything and nothing. If he had stopped and let this happen-

Techno turns his head to look at the ringmaster, his suit more red than blue at this point.

Instead of the uneasiness and fear that usually overtake him at the sight of this man, he feels rage. Pure and unfiltered rage for the man who hurt him.

Who hurt Tommy? They better prepare to die.

He lays Tommy down gently before standing up. He’s still stumbling as he walks but he’s not too worried about that, his eyes are focused on this bastard who made his life a living hell.

When he gets close enough he grabs the man by the collar of his jacket, the man looks calm, cocky.

It pisses Techno off.

The ringmaster grins up at him “What are you gonna do? You’re weak, Blade. If the boy doesn’t die now, you’ll end up killing-”

Techno punches him in the face. Hard.

He hears the satisfying crack of something breaking and does it again.

And again.

And again.

He does it until his knuckles are scraped and bleeding and his hand is soaked in the man's blood.

Despite this, despite his face being disfigured and absolutely bloodied up, the man is grinning at him and that makes a primal sort of rage boil deep down in his gut.

Kill him.

An animalistic sound leaves his throat and he can actually feel his blood moving through his veins, aware of every sensation in his body.

He actually considers it. He adjusts his grip so he's holding the man by the neck, and despite the grin on his face, his pulse is faster than ever.

His grip tightens and the man gasps in a breath. So easy. It'd be so easy to just crush his neck. A quick and painless death, as fast as a blink of an eye.

Instead, he brings the man off of the ground. He doesn't deserve a painless death. and even so, now is not his time to die, yet.

He holds the ringmaster with a bruising grip, his grin turned into a panicked expression as he tries to pry Techno's hands off and kicks his legs.

He doesn't spare any more time on the bastard, launching him across the room with a swipe of his arm.

He slams into a wall with a loud crack, then drops to the floor, lying unconscious.

Techno looks at Nestorio, who's standing off to the side nervously.

"Leave."

Nestorio looks surprised, glancing at Tommy on the ground before looking back at Techno, he opens his mouth.

"Not, a word." he spits the words out "Leave."

Nestorio snaps his mouth shut, nodding, and turning away.

Techno is glad he doesn't need another fight today, he's tired. He's so, so tired and it weighs down on every part of his being.

There's a small noise, and Techno knows that to be Tommy.

Tommy who could die, Tommy who is not dying if Techno has anything to say about it.

Technoblade never dies. And Techno hopes that applies to the few people that he's ever cared about.

There's a reason people say that.

They've seen him walk away from explosions, without a scrape. The public almost saw Techno get cut in half once, and he is still alive.

There's a reason for that.

Techno clenches his fists by his sides. Open and closed. Trying to channel whatever power he can.

He's weak, from years of disuse. He barely knows if he can even harness his powers, for good or bad.

Healing.

That's his power. Healing. It is that simple. Not a rare power, but rare in the sheer amount of injuries Techno could inflict.

Healing. Healing that was used so wrong, against so many people who probably can't walk today.

Techno closes his eyes, Tommy is limp. He might as well be dead.

Techno's never been one for deities or belief in a higher power. But he prays nonetheless. To every God that he learnt instead of being in school.

He's pretty sure he makes up some new Gods on the spot.

Techno grits his teeth and closes his eyes, hands hovering. Not sure where to go. (Stop the bleeding? But there's internal injuries as well.)

"Don't think of him," Nestor says quietly, and Techno whirls around, hand on his dagger, and hands shaking. "Okay. It's like ripping someone open, but reverse."

Techno glares.

"He's going to die Techno," and Nestor's voice is too calm for that to be what he really felt. "Picture the wounds stitching themselves together."

"You don't have healing powers." Techno replies, eyes closed but turned so he's facing Tommy.

"I trained you." Nestor says slowly, and carefully. "Like first aid."

Techno can't be bothered with a response, and instead balls up his fists and thinks of... a lot of things.

Phil caring for his wounds with a gentleness that Techno was yet to see. Whether a bruise or a cut across his stomach.

Wilbur, with the pair of them standing in the bathroom and Techno wincing as Wilbur cleaned away the blood. They had been brothers then, but Techno is still yet to admit it. Promises of not telling Phil and promises that Wilbur was going to be his brother, even if Techno didn't want a brother.

Techno takes a deep breath. Healing. Not hurting.

On one hand, this goes well. Tommy lives.

On the other hand, Techno's weak powers do nothing and Tommy dies.

On the other, other hand. Techno rips apart the boy, without even meaning to, and his last words are echoing sobs.

Cool. No pressure.

Good things. Think of good things. Think of nice things, think of-

Wilbur and him watching Disney movies for no reason apart from it being fun. Him meeting Floof for the first time and Floof attacking Wilbur.

Meeting Niki, a blessing, a kind person and one of the few people almost solely responsible for keeping Techno's sanity together by a thread.

Phil laughing, and hitting Wilbur with that stupid bucket hat.

Tommy... Tommy laughing and recording and stupid Tommy who is too young, and too smart and too human.

A faint pink glows from his hands.

And it heals. Over whatever it touches, it heals. Sewing skin and flesh together, and bone and fixing everything-

Tommy wakes up.

And he's thrashing straight away, fighting against Techno. Who holds him weakly.

"Please- Please- Help me- Techno!"

Techno holds onto Tommy tighter, shushing him quietly to try and calm him down, a faint pink glow emitting from his hands and sealing Tommy's wounds. Tommy doesn't seem to notice it in his panic.

"Tommy." he calls out "Tommy look at me." he places the boy's hand on his chest, trying to ignore his own shakiness and hammering heart.

Tommy seems to notice his distress too and lets out a sob "Your heart-"

"Not important right now." he interrupts "I know you're in pain, but you have to listen to me, you are not going to die. I will not let you die." he holds Tommy's hand closer "I need you to follow my breathing until you've calmed down, okay?"

Tommy seems disoriented and confused at his words but as soon as Techno starts to take deep breaths, he follows closely.

It takes a while, hiccups, sobs and small droplets of blood interrupting Tommy's attempts which only makes him more panicked.

Techno stays patient, calming down himself as he breathes with Tommy, taking this time to properly heal the boy in his arms.

Once they're both calmed down, silence settles in between them, only broken by Tommy's occasional sniffles.

"Did-" he sniffles "Did you know I was Theseus?"

Techno hums, exhaustion apparent, "I had my doubts, but I knew there was something up. When you got a pierced lung I tried chalking it up to a coincidence but when you started yelling for me..." he holds the boy in a tight hug "That confirmed it for me."

Tommy nods on Techno's shoulder, silence eating them up again.

"Also, Floof," Techno says, it's a poor attempt at a joke. It's barely a joke, more of the truth than Techno's willing to admit.

Techno sighs.

"You do realise... You just broke my trust for you."

Tommy nods and Techno can feel his newly shed tears wetting his shirt and Tommy clutching onto his arms as if in fear he'd disappear.

"I know, I know- I'm sorry, Techno- I'm so sorry.." Tommy sobs in his arms but Techno stays silent, his warm hold on the boy the only reassurance he gets.

The sobs wracking through Tommy's body shake him to his very core but he can't bring himself to speak any words of reassurance as they'd be, more likely than not, lies.

But they'll be okay. It might take a bit. But they would be okay.

Tommy's a good kid, and Techno is too easy to forgive

He picks up Tommy, standing up and looking around for the exit.

Tommy is yet again, on the brink of unconsciousness, obviously exhausted from what just happened, so Techno takes off his cape and covers Tommy with it. Tommy looks even younger (somehow).

He walks out of the warehouse, not looking back to see if there was any more important information inside.

He wants to get out of there as quickly as possible. He has very little care if the answer to life is in that fucking warehouse. He is out of there.

He walks through the streets in almost complete silence, the creaking of his leg and Tommy's quiet snores and steady breathing keeping him grounded.

He allows his mind to drift as he walks to where he knows Tommy's apartment building is.

He knows he's in shock, he knows the dam is gonna break eventually and he'll have to deal with the aftermath. Phil and Wilbur will have to deal with the aftermath.

This is going to set back years of progress he made on his mental health, he just hopes the consequences aren't too bad.

Tommy tried handing him back to The Pit.

The child currently sleeping in his arms decided to take advantage of his vulnerable state of mind and handed him to the man who robbed him of his childhood.

He should be mad.

He should be as pissed as he was with the ringmaster.

But he's not.

All he can feel is a strange sense of sadness and emptiness.

He can't describe it, just an empty sense of nothingness wrapping itself around him like a blanket. It's comforting, it's nice and Techno won't think about the future, because that is decidedly not comforting.

He doesn't want to imagine how he's going to face Tommy at work.

So he doesn't.

Instead he walks through the streets, the only thing reminding him that he's safe and not... there, wherever that might be. With the soft snoring of Tommy and the irregular creak of his leg.

That won't work soon enough, and he'll need another one. Still, he hopes that this one will last long enough.

He stops. And for a moment he doesn't quite know why he stops.

Techno brings his attention back to the world around him as he stands in front of the apartment building.

He has the plan to never come back here, maybe he'll drop off the face of the Earth and move to... Ohio. He has no clue what the fuck is in Ohio, but maybe he'll go there. Phil may not approve, but he'd live.

Tommy has a particularly loud snore, and Techno wants to laugh at that.

He really is a child.

A scared child.

And Techno can't be mad at a child, no matter how much he jokes about wanting to drop-kick babies and toddlers. Tommy is a kid, he's *Tommy*, he's scared and probably just wanted to go home.

This isn't quite the time for a mental breakdown... but soon will be.

A child. Tommy is a child. And everyone seems to keep forgetting it.

Techno shakes Tommy lightly in his arms "Wake up." he watches as Tommy's tired eyes peek up at him from under his cape "We're at your apartment, I'm assuming you don't want your roommates to see me so I'm leaving you here."

Tommy nods, carefully letting himself be put on the floor, yawning as he speaks up "How'd you know where I live?"

"Your file has your address and I have a good sense of direction."

Tommy hums in acknowledgement but doesn't move to go inside. He instead looks at Techno, and Techno can not handle the just... sorrow in Tommy's expression.

He gets it, Tommy's sorry. But that is not going to help anything right now.

Techno honestly doesn't want to spend any more time here than he has to so he sighs and turns away.

"I'll see you at work." he says as a farewell and walks away.

The walk is... weird, Techno isn't sure if he's passing out every now and again. Because there are some gaps in his memory. Like one moment he's walking, and the next moment he's sitting on the ground with a headache.

It's odd, Techno normally knows what's going on. That's kind of his job. He stands up again, pushing off the wall to stand up and he looked around. Everything feels a little bit fuzzy, and he blinks, vision coming into focus.

Odd. But not the weirdest thing that's happened today.

He keeps walking, and he doesn't think of much. His mind is completely blank, apart from the odd thought about Floof. Because... Floof.

He thinks he passes out again, because he's laying in the back of an alley and everything feel fuzzy. How did he get in the back of an alley? He has no clue how the fuck he got in the back of an alley.

Standing up, he notices the tower in front of him, and he almost cries at the relief of that. He walks forwards and he opens the door. It's empty, because it's probably some disgustingly late time.

Two in the morning maybe?

There's no one around, it's completely empty and Techno doesn't really know how he was let in. The doors should be locked, but he finds himself not caring at all. Instead he approaches the elevator.

Everything is slightly fuzzy, if that's from tears, exhaustion or a mixture of both, he has no clue. Instead he slams his hand against the buttons and leans against the side of the elevator.

He is tired. Just... incredibly tired.

He only realizes he left his cape with Tommy when he's in the elevator of the tower.

The doors open and he's greeted by a pacing Phil and a Wilbur in pajamas on the sofa.

Huh. That means they waited for him.

Their heads snap up to look at him when he stumbles out of the elevator.

"Techno—"

"I forgot my mask." Techno interrupts as he remembers that detail.

"Is that blood?"

"What happened?"

Techno blinks, now acutely aware of the blood staining his neck, fist and clothes. His mouth can't form words to describe what happened.

Phil approaches him, Wilbur behind him, keeping his distance so as to not distress him. Phil carefully holds his hands, uncaring for the blood staining one of them.

"Techno," he starts, careful "are you okay?"

And all at once his brain catches up—

That's when it all comes crashing down, sobs leaving his body as shock finally settles in, curling on into himself so his family doesn't have to look.

The ringmaster.

Nestorio.

Tommy.

His sobs sound closer to wails as his body shakes uncontrollably.

Phil immediately pulls him into a grounding hug and Techno latches on, crying on his father's shoulder like a little kid after a nightmare. He wishes this was a nightmare.

He wishes he'd just wake up and be able to laugh this all off.

He wishes he wasn't so weak.

He makes grabby hands at Wilbur, who instantly joins the hug, holding onto Techno as tightly as Techno is onto Wilbur.

He's terrified.

He sobs, he wails, he breaks down and he feels weak. He feels pathetic and most of all, he feels undeserving of the affection he's being given.

He doesn't quite remember passing out but he wishes he hadn't because for the next hours, all he dreams of are arenas and sadist smiles.

WE HAVE ART!!! BY THE LOVELY WICKED!!!



Chapter Summary

It starts from where Techno paused at the warehouse. Where Techno sees “the ring-master” and he freaks out. His hair gets cut and he notices a prick in the back of his neck. Everything is fuzzy, Nestor is being a bit of a manipulative dick. Then he notices Tommy screaming for his life, and Techno goes “must protect brother” and so Techno heals Tommy (power reveal!)

Then... Techno takes Tommy home, he keeps passing out on his way back to the tower. There he sees Phil and Wilbur and he has a bit of a breakdown and just cries.

Hello. We are back. (A-Author wrote most of this chapter, so give them the clout they deserve.) Speaking of clout, I have been given to promote one of my fics. [Eudamonia](#), it's basically a God AU it's a oneshot, for what that's worth. So give it a read if you want!

Updates (might) be quicker, idk yet. We shall have a conversation about it. Give A-Author so much clout. A-Author who also made a [SPOTIFY PLAYLIST](#) so check that out!!! (If you want to of course)

(Also... how would y'all feel about a discord? We would like to set up one soooooo)

In Which Tommy Deals With The Consequences Of His Actions

Chapter Notes

I AM BACK BITCHES AND I AM READY TO RUMBLEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE. THIS CHAPTER IS FLUFFIER, FEATURING THE CONSEQUENCES OF ACTIONS!

Warnings: Panic attacks, talks of death, mentions of the last two chapters (I feel like that should be a warning in itself.)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy stumbles into his apartment, because... of obvious reasons. He lands on the floor, foot caught slightly in the window and stares up at the roof for a long moment. Footsteps are around him.

Tubbo screams.

“Tommy!” Tubbo again, dragging Tommy up into a sitting position. “Tommy, Tommy-”

“I’m fine,” Tommy says, “There’s no injury. Not my blood.”

Tubbo stares at him for a long moment, eyes filled with concern and care, before flinging his arms around Tommy’s shoulders and hugging him so hard that Tommy couldn’t breathe. “The- it cut out and I,” Tubbo takes a deep breath and hugs Tommy a bit tighter. “What happened to you?”

Tommy just laughs, “Nothing,” he lies, because... if he’s one thing at his core, it’s a liar. “Made some... awful decisions and now will regret it for the rest of my life,” he gives a smile. Mostly to make it seem more joking.

It does not appear to have that effect, and Tubbo’s face drops. “The panic button?”

“Wasn’t exactly thinking straight,” Tommy laughs, and it’s forced even to him.

There’s shuffling and Ranboo standing in the doorway, looking bleary eyed and like he was going to pass out at any moment. His expression changes when his eyes settle on Tommy and he essentially runs forwards, pushing Tubbo aside.

“I’m fine,” Tommy groans, lifting up where the stab wound was. He knows there isn’t anything there of concern. “Not going to bleed out on the floor.”

Blood still stains his hands, Tommy took a deep breath. He isn’t going to look into that too much, instead he hauls himself up off the ground and Tubbo looks at him with just... an unbelievable amount of concern.

He looks at his friends, and how caring they are, their eyes soft and ready to listen to anything that Tommy had to say.

He doesn’t deserve that.

Instead he shakes his head, “I’m going to shower. Then sleep.”

And so that’s what he did, scrubbed away blood and felt the way it was underneath his fingernails. Then proceeds to pick it out with a pen (not one of his finer moments.)

Eventually he trudges to bed.

He hits the bed.

Lights out.

He falls into a restless sleep, he knows this because he wakes up tired. Exhausted to his very bones.

Still he rolls out of bed, he gets dressed.

Everything feels... fuzzy, for lack of a better term. Like Tommy is watching everything fall apart at his fingertips. He can reach and reach for the threads but he's not going to put them together until everything's hit the floor.

Ranboo would say something inspirational like with the pieces you can create something different and arguably less likely to fall apart again.

But fuck that.

Tommy pulls on his hoodie, grabs his earphones and starts the walk. Everything felt odd. Tommy didn't, quite feel in it. He knew that everything was happening, he could feel himself move and the cars zoom past him.

It just... felt off.

There was still blood underneath his fingernails. And here he was, hoping that he could just. Forget everything, here he was, thinking that everything would be okay. What did Techno know? Was he about to get the shit kicked out of him?

Maybe. And Tommy wouldn't be completely unforgiving of it. It's something that... was almost deserved really.

Huh. He probably should've died last night, he probably should be left on the warehouse floor for some unlucky soul to find in the morning and stare at him as Tommy becomes another one of the thousands who die every year.

He takes a deep breath. The tower... in front of him.

Well. Either Techno beat the shit out of him, or he didn't come out of this tower alive. He sighs and runs a hand through his hair before taking a step towards the door.

Two people crowd the door, one of them has a toolbox. "Mornin' gents," Tommy manages and he gets a nod back.

He steps into the foyer.

This is fine. Everything is fine. Everything is great. Amazing. More adjectives to describe how great and amazing this is.

Tommy looks around.

"Hello Thomas," Henry says, almost into his ear despite... being an AI and Tommy jumps. "You appear to be having difficulty breathing."

"And you appear to be being a bitch," Tommy snaps, "But I'm not here pointing that out, am I?"

"Well..." Henry starts as Tommy shows his keycard to Kristin who nods but beckons him over. "Technically, you did just tell me that I am... *'appear to be being a bitch'* so you are technically wrong."

Tommy takes a deep breath, "Technically, I am going to delete your fucking coding if you don't shut the fuck up- hi Kristin!" He smiles and Kristin gives him a look. "What?"

"Don't swear so much," she laughs and it's very fond. She reaches under her desk and pulls out four cupcakes. One is pink. One is yellow. One is red. One has a love heart on it. Tommy reaches for the one with the love heart on it.

Kristin snatches the plate away and glares at Tommy for a moment. “No.”

“But-”

“Not for you.”

“What, is it for *Phil*? ” Tommy taunts.

“Yup,” Kristin says, “He gave me a lift home the other day, this is me saying thank you.”

Tommy nods. He picks up the plate, and decides he won’t take the heart cupcake, because he doesn’t have a death wish and if he knows one thing about women. They are very cool, very poggers one might say. But they are fucking terrifying, they’ll smile at you and then threaten to take your organs.

Okay... that might be based off of the few times he’s worked with Aurelian. Aurelian is... terrifying, she smiles at you and then she tells you the best way to get someone’s organs without them knowing.

Tommy looks at the elevator, then looks at Kristin who gives him a supportive smile. “You alright?”

“Fine,” Tommy squeaks and lies.

Kristin raises an eyebrow.

“Shut up...” he flounders for a reason. “Floof. Is... scary?”

He hadn't even thought about Floof attacking him, Floof was going to... learn how to use a knife and stab him. Tommy had no doubt about that.

His head felt fuzzy for a moment, and his chest felt tight.

"Thomas. You appear to not be breathing." Henry chimes into his ear. "Would you like me to contact someone?"

"No!" Tommy yells, mostly without thinking about it. Kristin jumps a little at that. Tommy takes a deep breath, and ignores the panic still clawing it way up his throat and latching onto his windpipe. Squeezing all the air out of his lungs. "I'm... good, Henry."

"Are you sure, Thomas?" Henry asks, the fuckin' snitch. "You appear to be having the early signs of a panic attack."

"And you're having the early signs of me changing your code so you stop fucking saying that," Tommy grumbles, he holds the plate a bit tighter and storms towards the door.

What he doesn't notice is Kristin looking at him with concern. He doesn't notice Kristin taking out her phone and messaging someone. He doesn't notice anything apart from his heart hammering in his chest and that air felt... difficult.

He steps into the elevator.

The elevator doors close.

"Thomas," Henry says. "You are worrying me."

"You're an AI," Tommy groans, leaning his head against the side of the elevator. "You don't have emotions. I'm fine Henry. Okay? Drop it. I am *fine* and no one needs to know that I'm not fine."

Henry... the bitch, has the audacity to sigh at him. Like a fuckin' human would. And Tommy, Tommy is one step away from getting Tubbo to mess with Henry. Because this AI needs to get off his back.

Said AI has fucked him over once, and he does not need a repeat of that. Does he look like an emotionally stable person right now? Does he look like someone who isn't going to look at Techno and burst into tears?

No. He is none of those things.

But he doesn't need the entire tower to know that he is on the verge of a panic attack or sobbing. Whatever comes first.

The elevator dings.

"Techno," that's Wilbur's voice and Tommy is not a fan of the way that he pauses completely. "Please," Wilbur's voice is filled with desperation. "Just tell us what happened, what did Theseus do to you?"

"Nothing." Comes Techno's rough reply. "Now leave me alone-"

Then Techno and Tommy are staring at each other for a long moment. Techno holding a folder and several pieces of paper in his hands.

They stare at each other for a moment.

Tommy's heart is in his throat, and he can't focus on anything apart from Techno's eyes boring into his. Like somehow Techno was trying to make him turn into ash by merely staring at him.

His chest feels tight.

“Hello.” Techno says.

Tommy doesn’t reply.

He’s going to get beaten up. This is it, this is where he gets murdered, by The Blade, at work. It’s not the worst way to go but it’s certainly not the best.

Techno steps forward.

Ah. Great.

Tommy takes a step backwards.

“Excuse me,” Techno says, tone short and clipped and dangerous. “I’m trying to get to my floor.”

Tommy nods and steps out of the way, without even thinking about it. He stares at Techno leaving and the terror won’t leave. It’s suffocating him, dragging him to the ground and then stomping on his lungs (metaphorically).

“Thomas,” Henry’s voice chides and Tommy jumps.

Wilbur is looking at the elevator doors, then his eyes jump to Tommy. “Don’t be offended, he’s just... struggling. He’s not mad at you.”

Ha.

Tommy almost has a full blown panic attack because of that, breathing becomes impossible for a moment and he's left there to just nod and hold his breath until Wilbur looks away. That doesn't take too long, because Phil emerges from a door at their right.

"Tommy," Phil says, he looks exhausted. "Hello."

"Cupcakes. Kristin." Tommy forces out, putting them down.

He's still not quite breathing, so like any unstable teenager does... he rushes past the both of them, to where he knows the stairs are. He might bump Phil on the way but he really doesn't know.

Reaching the bathroom he pushes the door open and closes it behind him. "Henry?" Tommy asks, "Can you please lock the door?"

"I can, Thomas."

"Please." Tommy mutters, mostly to himself.

"My protocol says that I can not lock doors to rooms when I believe occupants will be in danger."

"Please," Tommy says again, sitting down against the door. "If things get bad... unlock the door, but- I just don't want to talk to anyone right now. Please."

There's a click behind him and Tommy relaxes so much more into the door. He doesn't say anything for a long moment, because there's not a lot that he can say. Apart from trying to ignore the panic he's feeling.

It's clawing up, taking control of his body, making it hard to breathe. Was breathing always this hard? He gasps for air, and somehow that doesn't even feel enough. He tries to take

another deep breath and fails.

He tries again and fails. Before drawing his knees to his chest and dropping his head so his forehead was resting on his knees, he struggles to breathe. His lungs aren't big enough and is this where he's going to die?

The only sound he can hear is his ragged breathing, which keeps failing him. Eyes filled with unshed tears.

Breathe.

He did not.

There was a knock on the door, "Tommy?" That's Philza Minecraft, the man, the myth, the legend himself. "Are you okay?"

Tommy doesn't bother with a response.

His chest feels tight, like that's what's stopping him from being able to breathe. Like something was wrapped around his throat and squeezing. He needed to breathe, he knew that, he knew he was panicking.

Still, that knowledge did not stop the terror from flooding his body. His heart beating harder and breathing... God, breathing was difficult.

"Henry, open this door."

"Sorry Philza Minecraft," Henry says and Tommy holds his breath for a moment. "I do not believe that Thomas is in any immediate danger, and opening this door would go against his wishes."

“I’ll override the door,” Phil snaps. “Don’t think I won’t.”

“I am fully aware you will,” Henry replies, with the amount of sass that an AI can manage. “But I will be carrying out Thomas’s wishes for as long as I can. Considering that he was made a high priority in my code six hours ago.”

“Who the fuck?” Phil mutters, “Tommy, are you alright?”

“Good!” Tommy calls back, and it sounds very, very fake to him. “I’m great! Can you give me a moment?”

“Okay... tell Henry if you need anything.” Phil says, his voice quiet and caring. "Stay safe."

Footsteps move away.

And for a long time Tommy doesn't focus on anything, just the terror in his gut. And trying to breathe.

His mind runs away from him, as it always does. Blood thumping so he can hear it in his ears, and almost feel it passing through his veins.

Breathing... isn't a top priority right now. Instead he panics again.

What the fuck was he thinking? Giving Techno up, someone who was clearly terrified of whoever those people were. What the fuck? They were armed, but Tommy had powers. Slightly faulty powers, but powers none the less.

Then Techno had healed him, he'd saved his life. Like that was nothing, like Tommy didn't try to give Techno up just so that he could go home—

He's just a kid. A kid way in over his head. A kid that wants to go home, wherever that may be, and a kid who really, really fucked up.

That starts sobs.

Sobs that heave and rock his entire body as he whispers apologies that no one is going to hear, apologises to people that weren't even alive any more.

It makes it so much harder to breathe, and he's crying and shaking and gasping for air in what feels like the most fucked up song he's ever heard.

Henry says... things that Tommy doesn't fully remember as he gains control of his breathing.

It takes a long time, and when he eventually has control over his breathing he stares at the bathroom wall for a long moment.

This really isn't a nice bathroom. It's a bit falling apart, nicer than the one in his apartment for sure. One of the sinks is half falling apart, but that's alright.

Tommy sighs and leans his head against the back of the door.

Techno hasn't killed him yet. Maybe he doesn't know? Tommy takes another deep breath to try and quell the panic in his gut.

Right. Techno probably knows.

But... he hasn't been stabbed yet. Maybe if he hides behind Wilbur and Phil, Techno won't stab him? It seems slightly too hopeful, but he doesn't want to get stabbed. Not again.

This was going to be fine.

Everything was fine. Great even.

Tommy stands up, legs shaky at best, about to collapse at the worst. He grabs onto the door and opens it.

Another day at the office.

He gets back to the SBI floor, (69th floor. Truly the pinnacle of comedy).

Phil is bright red, Wilbur is sitting on a table like a gremlin holding the yellow cupcake and he grins at Tommy.

"Hey Tommy!" Wilbur exclaims, "Do you like Phil's cupcake?"

Tommy looks at Phil. He is bright red and looking at the cupcake with the heart on it like it holds the answers to the world.

"Oh," Tommy says, more than willing to forget what had happened this past day and try to stoke the fire. "Yeah, Kristin wouldn't let touch that."

Somehow Phil goes even redder.

Tommy grabs the red cupcake with a surprising amount of confidence. The he peels off the cupcake pan and proceeds to stuff the entire thing into his mouth.

Wilbur gives him a look.

Tommy just smiles, mouth filled with cupcakes.

Wilbur winces and scrunches up his nose, "Were you raised through a barn?"

"I was dragged," Tommy mutters through his cupcake. "Not raised."

With an eye roll, Wilbur stands up, he picks up the pink cupcake. "I'll give this to Tech-"

"Wilbur-"

"See you Phil!" Wilbur announces and darts towards the elevator.

Phil sighs.

"Is Techno... okay?" Tommy asks slowly, "He seems off."

Phil's face drops immediately and turns into something a little dangerous. Even his posture changes, he stands up slightly straighter.

Tommy can't stop himself from taking a step back. Distancing himself from the threat—

Then with a quiet sort of horror he realises that his brain just saw Phil as a threat. Phil's face softens immediately.

"No mate," he says, "I'm not mad at you. Techno... he went on a mission with Theseus and he came back a bit of a wreck."

Oh.

So Phil is mad at him. Great. And Wilbur hated Theseus at the best of times. Cool, great, fantastic.

Tommy nods. "Oh."

Phil's face shows contempt and almost hatred. "Theseus," he spits the word like its poison. "Appears to be causing us more harm than good."

Oh. Okay.

Cool.

Tommy nods and forces a smile onto his face, "Yeah. Kid is a PR disaster."

Phil's face softens and he smiles, "Don't worry about him kiddo. We have this sorted."

And that was about fifty percent of the problem. Tommy nods, before looking down the hallway of offices.

"I'm gonna-" he gestures at his office. "Yeah. Okay."

Then he stumbles towards his office and pauses outside the door. He can hear Wilbur and Techno talking. Struggling to hear, he strains a bit.

"We can get him," Wilbur says, "Techno. Just tell us what he did-"

There's the unmistakable sound of papers being slammed down. "You want to know Wilbur? The kid fucked up, then almost died in my arms! He should be dead!"

That was yelled, and Tommy didn't need to strain the hear that one. Tommy opens his door and slips into his office quietly.

The silence after that is telling. And Tommy if asked, would never admit to rolling his chair closer to the wall.

It's quiet for a moment longer.

"Kid?"

"He's a kid." Techno confirms. "A child. Younger than Tommy."

"You know his identity."

"I do."

"I can have you arrested for that." Wilbur snaps.

"I know."

Another best of silence and Tommy was surprisingly invested in this. Even if he wasn't involved.

"So?" Techno asks, "You gonna arrest me? I can already see the headlines. So? I'm not going to tell you."

"You should."

"But I won't." Techno counters, his voice surprisingly strong. "Because I've been a vigilante before and the only reason I'm a hero is because I was caught."

Wilbur sighs, and Tommy stands up so he's pressing his ear against the wall.

"Is being a hero that bad?"

"I was threatened with life in prison if I wasn't one," Techno sounds dismissive, just a little bit angry too. "I won't let that happen to Theseus."

"You're really protecting Theseus?"

"With my life."

"Phil always says that-"

"Family comes first." Techno finishes, slightly tired, like he's done this a countless number of times before. "If I ever believe Theseus is a real threat, I'll tell someone."

Tommy moves away from the wall, and he turns on his computer. For a long moment he stays there, not entering the password.

Techno's protecting him. For no reason. Despite the fact that Tommy sold him out with no hesitation, despite how much he fucked up. Techno is still... covering for him, lying for him.

Tommy sits there for a moment longer, thinking about it all.

Techno... knew, that was almost certain. Techno also appeared to know just how badly Tommy had fucked up, just how bad of a mistake that was.

But still, he didn't tell Wilbur. He kept his mouth shut, and he didn't appear to be afraid of being arrested (maybe for life) for him.

What the fuck?

What the everloving fuck was wrong with Techno?

Tommy sits there for a long moment. Staring at his empty computer screen. If only for a moment longer.

Then he opens his emails, and starts again. Ah. Days at the office. With cupcakes, panic attacks and more!

He throws himself into his work, which at the moment is basically replying to Netflix and telling them that '*no, SBI does not want a documentary series about their life.*' But being polite about it.

The phone on the desk rings and Tommy picks it up mid-sentence. He doesn't get a lot of calls, but the ones he does get appear to be important.

"Hello, Tommy, PR department. How can I help you?"

He's found out that's the best and most generic response. If someone else's PR is calling him, then he can elaborate if they ask. And for anyone outside the agency that is enough detail.

"Hi Tommy," a cheerful voice says, "We're calling on behalf of Netflix—"

"Ah," Tommy laughs, "I've already responded to several emails regarding that. The answer is no."

"But—"

Tommy hangs up and groans. Before finishing his email and sighing. He hits his head against the table a few times, then keeps on his day.

Nothing of note happens, until he gets an advertising request. That leads to the question... can heroes have brand deals.

He emerges from his office. Phil is in the living area and Wilbur is sitting on a counter eating curry out of a container. With his hands.

Wilbur looks at him.

"Didn't you go to a boarding school?" Tommy asks, "Wouldn't they teach you how to use cutlery?"

Wilbur flips him off and Tommy watches him eat curry with his hands. It's one of his lower moments.

"The fuck do you want?" Wilbur asks.

"Can heroes take sponsorships?"

"No." Wilbur says, "Same way politicians can't. Techno almost got fired once for mentioning his own plushies while on patrol."

"Vigilantes?" Tommy asks, a few ideas popping into his head.

Wilbur shakes his head, "No rules for them. Vigilantes are already illegal, can't regulate illegal things. Even if it was, wouldn't matter."

Phil gets up from the couch and his bones crack uncomfortably. He winces before looking at the pair of them.

"Heroes can't advertise," Phil yawns.

Tommy nods, "Another question. Do you have diets?"

"Huh?" Phil blinks at him.

"Twitter wants to know." Tommy explains and both of them nod, apparently that makes perfect sense and Tommy wants to laugh at that.

Wilbur gets off the counter and wipes his hands on his pants. "We're supposed to. Most of us don't, it's supposed to help maximise brain function and energy and stuff."

"Most of us just eat what we want," Phil adds. "Any more questions?"

Tommy shakes his head and gets out his phone. He opens Twitter.

Time to Tweet at himself.

@arandomintern: yoooo I just found out superheroes can't legally advertise. Vigilantes however... *@theseus* guess you up for any sponsorships?

Then he puts down his phone and smiles.

Wilbur's phone buzzes and he picks it up straight away. His face falls and he glares at Tommy. "Most people don't tell their mortal enemies that they can make money off their gig."

Tommy shrugs, then he turns around to walk around and look badass.

He bumps into Techno.

"Sorry!" He says and Techno stares down at him for a moment. Tommy scrambles out of the way and wills himself so that he doesn't get stabbed.

Techno's eyes dart away and look at Phil. "I know who Theseus is."

And... Tommy has never moved so quickly, he whips his head around so that he's looking at the three of them.

Techno looks calm. Almost worryingly calm.

Terror rises in Tommy again. Ah. Here we go-

"And I won't tell you." Techno adds, "Arrest me if you want."

Phil blinks at him. "Oh."

Tommy turns back around like his heart isn't thumping in his chest and like breathing isn't one of the most difficult things he's ever done.

Cool. Cool.

"Okay?" Phil says. "I'm not... arresting you?"

"Okay." Techno turns around and walks away, back to his office.

Wilbur and Phil stare at each other again. They look at the closed door, then at each other. Wilbur tilts his head at Tommy, and Phil nods.

"Hey Toms," Wilbur says, eyes still on the door. "Dream is doing an interview tomorrow and their PR person needs a hand for tomorrow."

Tommy nods. "That's nice."

"You should help them."

"You could just ask me to leave the room, y'know." Tommy deadpans, "I can do some artsy shots for the vlogs and stuff."

Wilbur nods, apparently a bit stunned. "Oh."

Tommy gives a salute and walks towards the elevator.

For the next hour or so he just wanders around, he films bits and pieces. (Including watching Dream hit Sappap with a cowboy hat). Watching some of the interns throw scrap bits of metal at each other and an assortment of heroes walking past.

That led to Tommy behind the counter with Kristin. She did her thing, and Tommy replied to some questions that people had regarding SBI on social media.

They were quiet, and Tommy realised a few things about Kristin. That she wore gloves, that she was a fast typer and that she could beat Tommy's ass with little hesitation.

It was the way she held herself, with a mix of confidence and grace. Kind of like a ballet dancer would. Once they had a ballerina come to their school and dance, and Tommy had been entranced by how strong and graceful they were at the same time.

He never took up ballet. One could only dream that he'd ever have enough money to be able to afford ballet.

Tommy looked up from his phone, and then proceeded to look at Kristin. She was thinking, it appeared.

"You alright?"

"Hmm? Yeah, fine thanks."

"You sound like Phil," Tommy laughed. "Been hanging out with him too much."

Kristin laughed, it was a fond thing and just generally sounded incredibly nice. She nodded and brushed hair out of her face. "Whatever you want to think Tommy."

"I'll need to coach him," Tommy sighed, "I am such a ladies man. I will need to coach him."

"Whatever you want Tommy, you do that- hey Phil!" Kristin smiled just a bit wider and Phil's smile only mirrored her own. "Fancy seeing you here."

"Crazy, right?"

"Come here often?"

"Too often," Phil sighed and looked at Tommy who was sitting on the chair. "Hey Tommy."

"Hello."

"Get some good footage?"

"Yup!"

And like that Tommy's big day out was over. And he was back on SBI floor.

The rest of the day moved slowly. And Tommy did his work, did what he was asked, rejected Netflix no less than ten more times.

Then there was something that needed Techno's approval. Essentially permission, to use his branding to make a plushie. Which in itself was amusing.

So he printed out the forms and trudged to Techno's office, feeling nothing but terror as he knocked on the door.

"Yes."

Tommy opened the door slowly. Techno was sitting at his desk, his head in his hands and his eyes were puffy.

"You're not Wilbur."

"The mercy distribution company needs permission to be redone because they are reorganising the structure of the company and lost the last one." Tommy walks up to Techno's desk, and places the pile of paper on it.

Techno just looks exhausted.

"Page ten and thirty have the things, the rest is just the contract. I read through it, it's the exact same as the last one minus dates being changed." Tommy looks down at his feet, heart thumping in his chest.

It was unlikely Techno would stab him, but the chances weren't zero.

Techno looks up at him, eyes exhausted and he sighs. "Thank you. For reading through it."

"It's the least I could do," Tommy mutters and Techno somehow looks even more exhausted. "You defended me to Wilbur—"

"Of course I did."

"Then you said—"

"I meant everything I said," Techno sighs, his normally monotonous tone with even less emotion in it than usual. "And I'm not talking about this now. Ever probably."

"Okay."

They fall into silence again, and Tommy's heart pounds in his throat. Almost uncontrollably.

Techno looks at him.

Tommy doesn't meet his eyes.

"For what it's worth..." he mutters, deciding just how interesting his shoes are. "I'm sorry."

Techno doesn't say anything, his mouth shuts with almost a click. He glares at the papers put on his desk like that will make Tommy stop existing. Some parts of Tommy wishes that it would.

He shakes his head, and stands up with a start. Tommy flinches backwards and pain erupts through the back of his head.

Techno stares at him. For a long moment. "I know you're sorry. But that doesn't make it better... it makes it worse."

Then Techno storms past, and the door shuts behind him, almost on Tommy's foot and shakes the whole room.

Oh.

Okay then.



Chapter End Notes

So... funny story right.

We have a discord now:

<https://discord.gg/rPSBfNKs>

Or if that doesn't work click [here](#)

So, I write for JACAM (Just Another Crash At Midnight) and TINAAOS (this lovely fic) and so three of us authors went.

Let's combine this ish! And now we have that, so for discussions about chapters, any art, updates, join! You might make some new friends too!!

In Which Tommy Gets Philza Merch

Chapter Notes

This chapter is 7k words long. That is why it took nine days to write. I would apologise, but I'm not sorry! Like not even a little bit! Soooooooooooooo...

This was fluff, then I went "eh angst?" and then I got sick of writing this chapter and so... no thank you, one of the scenes was supposed to have way more detail. But it didn't.

Summary at the end for anyone who needs/wants it!

Warnings: panic attack, mentions of blood and some light violence.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The days feel like they are a bit pointless. It almost becomes a dance, Techno and Tommy avoid each other and Tommy spends a lot of time with Wilbur.

He doesn't expect to get this attached with Wilbur, especially when he's aware how much he hates vigilantes.

But, Wilbur is surprisingly funny. He once makes Tommy laugh so hard that he spits his drink out all across the bench and then they have to clean that up while laughing so hard they can barely stand.

So... three days are spent laughing with Wilbur.

Tommy also learns something quite important about Wilbur, he's trying to find out who Theseus is. Tommy... does not say jackshit, because he likes being alive.

So he's lying to Wilbur and avoiding the only person who really knows who he is.

Which is great for his mental health. Note the sarcasm.

"Yeah," Wilbur says one morning, eating toast here rather than at his apartment. Tommy is pretty sure Wilbur lives here. "Employees get free old merch, as long as you don't onsell it, you can get the old stuff."

Tommy's eyes go wide. "I can get Philza merch? For free?"

Wilbur nods and crumbs fall onto the counter. For someone who went to some rich ass schools he can't eat toast right.

"What was Phil's money wasted on? You can't even talk fancy."

Wilbur raises an eyebrow, and wipes his hands on his pants. "I can. I just don't need to right now."

"Ten thousand dollars a year," Tommy mutters. "Minus uniforms, books, school trips—"

Wilbur sighs. "I can speak fancy, Phil can too... Techno can't for jackshit, reckon you'll be the same."

Tommy doesn't respond, there is a way that both Tommy and Techno speak that's native to Logsteshire. Dropping some letters, skipping some words. Most people don't notice it, but Tommy can pick out a Logsteshire native like nothing else.

Wilbur and Phil speak like they're from Upper L'Manburg, which they probably are. Tubbo does too, that doesn't mean a lot, it's just a fun detail.

He shrugs.

"Remind me to never bring you to a fancy event." Wilbur sighs and rests his forehead against the counter.

"Oh yeah!" Tommy scrambles for his phone. "You have a charity event to go to, you have a plus one and need to make some sort of speech."

"What charity?" Wilbur groans. Not moving so his voice was slightly muffled by the counter.

"L'Manburg School Relief, basically they give students free tuition so lower socioeconomic areas can afford to go to Upper L'Manburg schools."

Wilbur groans.

Tommy gives him a look.

"What?" Wilbur asks.

"Probably don't be so dismissive of the charity that's putting one of my roommates through school," Tommy deadpans.

To Wilbur's credit, he actually looks sorry he blinks at Tommy for a few moments. His mouth is in an 'O' shape.

Tommy rolls his eyes, "So are you done being a rich dickhead?"

"Yeah... sorry. What school does your roommate go to?"

"Prime Technology and STEM School," Tommy says, like someone who has said it a million times, which isn't wrong. "The charity isn't funded enough, so can only give those

scholarships to the best of the best. And he's one of the best."

Wilbur nods, "Tell me about him."

And if there's one thing he can do, it's talk about Tubbo. And so he does.

"Well he's my childhood best friend—"

He talks about the sums that Tommy knew Tubbo could do half asleep, and how that Tubbo would help him get through his own schooling and the projects that Tubbo would get up to in his own time.

Then Tommy keeps talking, he talks about the hacking and doesn't stop when Wilbur gives him a warning look.

He just talks about how cool Tubbo is, and there's something in Wilbur's eyes which is relaxed and fond.

"Don't you have two roommates?" Wilbur asks, an amused tone in his voice.

"Ugh. Ranboob." Tommy screws up his nose. "I hate that bitch."

Wilbur raises an eyebrow, and his expression goes all concerned again.

"It's a meme at this point. My resentment for Ranboo. He's cool," Tommy smiles. "You can't tell anyone what I'm about to tell you."

Then he rants about Ranboo, because he loves his friends and if someone is willing to hear. He is more than willing to speak.

Wilbur listens with interest, nodding and laughing whenever Tommy pauses. It's nice.

Tommy finishes and Wilbur is smiling widely and his face has gone all soft and fond.

"You okay?"

"Yeah," Wilbur grins. "I'd love to meet these two, see if they're that cool."

Tommy shrugs.

In his spare time, which there isn't a lot of anymore, he creates his videos for the SBI YouTube channel. He unlists all the old ones, because they're dumb.

Then he reads about the YouTube algorithm. Like... a lot. And he learns how to play it the best he can. He hasn't done anything with this knowledge, it's just in the back of his brain.

Two more days pass with nothing of consequence.

Then something of consequence happens.

Purpled. The bitch is in his building, he's in the foyer talking to Quackity. Leaning against the wall, and looking slightly smug and very confident.

Quackity looks ever so slightly nervous.

"Tommy!" Quackity calls out. "Meet our new employee, Daniel Grey."

Tommy stares at Purpled.

Purpled stares back at him.

Now. Purpled has as many fake identities as Tubbo does, and all of them had solid backgrounds. Even Tubbo couldn't find any holes to poke.

Purpled (Daniel Grey as he's being called right now) smiles, it's fake, and he holds out his hand.

Tommy shakes it. "Nice to meet you— Dan."

"The pleasure's all mine Thomas," Purpled snaps back, in the exact same tone and Tommy stares at him.

Purpled isn't broke, he's made sure of that. He doesn't need the job, which means that Purpled is here for a client.

That very well means that Purpled is willing to get Tommy fired.

Because, yes, Tommy trusts Purpled with his life, Purpled was his first friend and the two understand each other in a way that no one else will ever understand the other. But Tommy does not trust Purpled with the tower.

They stare at each other a moment longer.

"Daniel here," Quackity continues, "Is one of the new security guards."

"Oh. Is he now?" Tommy deadpans.

Purpled gives Tommy a look.

Tommy glares a little more.

Quackity looks confused. "Do you two... know each other?"

"Something like that," Purpled says, his voice is still polite, almost pleasant, but his cool expression at Tommy says it all.

Tommy glares, and gets a glare back.

"Can we have a moment?" Purpled asks, his voice laced in false kindness.

Quackity nods and basically sprints off.

Tommy looks around the empty foyer before glaring at Purpled. "What are you doing here? Don't touch my domains, and I don't even look at yours."

Purpled sits down on one of the couches, crossing his legs and grinning lopsidedly. "Tommy."

"Oh fuck off, we made a deal."

"We did."

"Why are you here *Dan Grey*? And when will you leave."

"I'm here on... personal business," Purpled crosses his arms and Tommy sits down across from Purpled. "I will not touch your heroes, and you will not interfere."

"You're acting weird."

"Just... don't," Purpled sighs and Tommy pulls a face. "In Purpled mode. I'm not gonna mess with your guys. I need personal info."

"What info?" Tommy leans back in his seat. "I might be able to help."

Purpled shakes his head. "I don't want you to."

"Okay."

They're both quiet for a long moment.

Purpled looks at Tommy. "My apartment is quiet."

Tommy tilts his head, trying to think about what this means. Purpled is looking down at his feet.

Then it hits— oh. Purpled just want to feel normal, he wants to be stupid and he wants to be a dumb teenager.

It's valid.

Tommy looks at Purpled and smiles, "Could I interest you in food at my house on the weekend? Meet my roommates?"

"Yeah. I guess you could." Purpled doesn't smile, but he sounds grateful and that's good enough.

Tommy goes back to his office, and he works for a while. That's peaceful enough.

For a while he just does his work, like a good little worker. He doesn't say much, mostly because there's no one in there and it doesn't make sense to speak while you work so why the fuck is he even thinking about it?

Eventually, after a while of editing, he gets bored. Quite bored actually and so he stands up and pokes his head out the door.

Techno's in the hallway, and Tommy goes to slam the door closed and move to Africa. But he does not see any of those things when he sees that Techno is holding onto the wall with one hand and holding coffee with his other hand.

"Have you... slept?" Tommy asks and Techno looks at him. He doesn't look very threatening if he's being quite honest, he looks kinda like an angry animal who's been dosed in water. Techno blinks at him, not giving anything away with his face.

"Pardon?" He says slowly, like the words take tremendous strain to say.

"Have you slept?" Tommy repeats, actually enunciating this time. "Since I last saw you?"

Techno just makes a grunt, which does not narrow down anything.

Right. Cool then, everyone give a round of applause to Technoblade for being the most fucking useful person in the universe. With all those social cues, there is *no* way that Tommy

can't know what he means.

Okay. Maybe too much sarcasm.

But Tommy is going to punt Techno into the sun.

Techno starts down the hallway, not too unlike a zombie. Tommy moves out of his office, because he's not completely sure if Techno will make it down the hallway. He shuffles a bit more, then looks at Tommy.

Then he just fucking... falls.

Like Techno's legs just went '*no, not today!*'

Tommy makes a noise and jumps to catch him. He does so with a bit of strain, but manages to hold Techno up as he just... snores.

The next thing Tommy realises is the coffee that was in Techno's hand is now mostly on his shirt, staining it probably beyond fixing and Tommy just wants to clobber the sleeping man. He liked this shirt!

Techno snores a bit louder.

"Uh..." Tommy calls out, "Phil!" His voice is a bit desperate and very worried, "Techno passed out."

There's muffled swearing, footsteps and Phil standing in the hallway. He looks almost as tired as Techno. "Sorry mate," Phil mutters and manages to take Techno from him with no struggle.

Phil sighs and shakes his head, it seems directed at Techno. “You fuckin’ idiot,” Phil mutters, and it is so fond, despite the fact that Techno will never hear this. Phil doesn’t need to say that, but he does anyway.

Something about that makes Tommy’s brain stop. Just for a moment.

“Oh. Your shirt,” Phil says and Tommy gives a blank look. “Wilbur!” Phil calls out.

“What?” Wilbur yells back.

“Techno passed out!”

“I heard!”

“Tommy needs a different shirt!” Phil yells again, and somehow Techno doesn’t wake up. He must be fucking exhausted. “Go to the merch closet!”

“But it smells!”

“Wilbur!”

“Fine!”

And that’s how Tommy ends up standing in front of a door as Wilbur mutters under his breath about how he’s a babysitter now, and that he did not go through years of training to just look after a gremlin child.

Wilbur opens the door.

And this is it, this is heaven. Tommy must've died.

It's shelves and pallets filled with merch. Hero merch. Covering the walls and being the majority of things he saw. There was one shelf which was obviously unreleased merch, and Tommy stumbled towards that first.

"Not supposed to have that—" Wilbur starts, then sighs as Tommy picks up one of the shirts.

It's a Gogy hoodie, with the signature glasses on the back of it. Across the shoulder blades, on the front is a neat little '*Glitch*' sewn in cursive on the upper left section of the shirt. It was small, and pretty tasteful.

Tommy would almost feel good wearing this outside. "Gogy!" He exclaims and looks at Wilbur. "Have I told you how awesome Gogy is?"

"That's not his hero name—" Wilbur tries.

"Glitch," Tommy scoffs, "Fucking generic, been done before. Don't remember that for shit. Gogy? Rolls off the tongue, is iconic, easy to market, make the goggles associated with his brand and then. Boom. Done. You've branded a hero."

Wilbur blinks at him, "There's a reason you're our PR guy."

Tommy laughs, folds up the Gogy shirt and puts it back on the shelf.

He looks at some of the other merch, mostly because he's wondering how much merch they can make for these guys. And why isn't this stored in a warehouse somewhere? Because...
jesus.

Tommy glances at the pallets. *J.S* was stamped on them, Tommy had no idea who J.S was, but he stores it in the back of his mind, the place he didn't use unless something reminded him of facts he did know.

“Who's J.S?”

“Jschlatt,” Wilbur adds, “He's in charge of the company who manages merchandise. What a prick.”

“What's wrong with him?”

Wilbur laughs and shakes his head, “Nothing, nothing, he's cool. He didn't reply to the meme I sent him yesterday, that's all.”

“How rude.”

“Right?” Wilbur yells, and Tommy nods. He looks at the next group of shirts, Dream merch, he skips over that, it's ugly. Then he finds the holy grail, it's the best thing that he's ever seen.

Philza Minecraft... shoes. They're shoes, with the small little hearts with the angry eyes that have become so iconic and associated with Philza Minecraft, the man, the myth, the fucking legend himself.

Tommy looks at Wilbur.

Wilbur nods.

Tommy almost faints and puts on the Philza Minecraft shoes, which he gasps at for a moment and jumps up and down in them. They're not going to fall apart, he smiles and spins around.

“Do I look snazzy?”

Wilbur sighs, it's very tired. He mutters something about babysitting, before turning on his heel and searching around on one of the pallets, he's muttering under his breath again and Tommy is just staring at him.

He searches for a bit longer, before reaching and pulling out something. It's a t-shirt, with *Spectre* in block letters. They were purple and had little stars around the letters. It was a fairly nice shirt, all things considered.

Wilbur grins, “Wear this.”

Tommy looks at him. “Dude.”

Wilbur throws it at Tommy who catches it and sighs. Wilbur then goes through the rest of the clothes for a moment, before grabbing a red hoodie and throwing it at Tommy. It hits him in the face with a thump and Tommy glares into the hoodie.

He holds it up. It's red Blade merch, with a little crown on it, with white stripes and little white drawstrings. Tommy glares at Wilbur and Wilbur gives a big grin.

“I'm not wearing this merch.”

“You are.”

“I'm not.”

So that's how ten minutes later, Wilbur with a bite mark on his hand and Tommy looking like he was thrown through a window. He trudges back to the main living area.

Techno is asleep on the couch, Phil is sitting on the couch with a tablet looking at something. He turns and looks at Tommy.

Tommy who is being drowned by the hoodie. He glares at Wilbur, then at Phil.

“I don’t like this.”

Phil just smiles, “Awwww, you look so young.”

“Fuck off.”

“You look like a child,” Wilbur adds, “Like an infant. Tiny baby child.”

“I resent you.” Tommy swings his arm at Wilbur and Wilbur ducks out of the way easily, before stumbling back slightly and laughing.

Tommy rolls his eyes, and brushes the hair out of his face. “I’m working.”

And he stomps off. Into his office.

Then he does work, as he should answering emails. Answering questions on Twitter from the weirdest questions about his job, to what SBI’s biggest regrets were, something that Tommy had no clue what it was.

That was interesting, to say the least. Tommy sighs and rests his head on the table, thinking of the sweet freedom of going home. Working a job was not all it was cracked up to be, and he actually liked these guys.

They were cool. Apart from Wilbur kicking him off a building, which thankfully had blown over. And the entire... Techno situation, something that Tommy is not going to be thinking of right at this moment, because he is in denial.

What are the stages of grief again? Denial. Anger. Bargaining. Depression. Acceptance. Yeah, Tommy firmly is in denial, and he's okay with that, he's accepting that he's grieving, and that's good enough.

Denial.

What a man.

So that's how Tommy spends a good chunk of his time, answering emails. Getting distracted on TikTok and Twitter (okay, there's Theseus fanart. It's so cool.) And then spinning on his chair for a bit.

It's peaceful.

His door is opened, and then it is decidedly not very peaceful. Wilbur is there, the force of nature that he is, even the weather seems to know, because the sun seems to hide from Wilbur.

Tommy is left to just look at Wilbur, a blank expression on his face. Even the sun is scared of him, and all Tommy can do is deal with this mess of a man.

Wilbur claps his hands together. "Have you had your paid break?"

Tommy just looks at him. "Yes. I watched YouTube for an hour."

"That's not—"

“I’m good.”

And that’s when Wilbur sighs, he slams his hands down on the desk and looks at Tommy.
“We’re going to the park.”

“Huh?”

“Now,” and Wilbur just... picks him up and places him by the door. Tommy doesn’t say anything, instead he follows Wilbur. Because while this technically isn’t his job... he’ll do it anyway.

So that’s how he ends up in a park.

It’s a very nice park, the lawns are a bright green, flowers are in beds and trimmed perfectly. The paths are nice, and there isn’t a single weed. There’s a pond surrounded with a wall made out of rocks and concrete, and a few ducks quacking around him. It’s quite nice actually.

There are a few families on the grass, sitting with picnic blankets and eating. Some of them were laughing, others were talking in their posh accents and talking about cryptocurrency or something.

Whatever rich people talked about.

Wilbur laughs, and throws an arm around Tommy’s shoulder.

There’s no playground, Tommy notes, and it seems like a bit of a just... fake place. It’s all too nice, even the toilets in the back corner look too good. Like they’re never used. Tommy pulls a face.

A duck gets out of the water, and waddles towards them. The duck looks at them, tilts its head and quacks.

Tommy... truthfully, Tommy quacks back.

Then they get in a quacking argument, because Tommy is dumb, and quite tired. Wilbur just nods at him, then quacks at the duck. The duck backs off and Tommy stifles his laughter with his hand.

So. He just got in an argument with a duck, that's new.

Wilbur sighs, and flops onto the grass.

Tommy looks around the park a little bit more, it's a bit small. With grassed areas, the pond thing appears to be the centre point. There's also a vending machine next to one of the gates.

He stares at the vending machine for a moment trying to figure out what it sells, then it clicks. Oh. That's duck food, in a vending machine, probably to stop people from feeding ducks bread.

It's a smart idea.

Tommy looks at the duck food, it's a vending machine. He expects that from an Upper L'Manburg park, but still.

He pats his pocket for money, or his card. Then realises that his card is at home and on the bench. He has his phone, but trying to set that up will be annoying. He sighs and gives up on feeding the duck.

Wilbur looks at him, an eyebrow raised and really just curious. He looks at the ducks quacking, then at Tommy.

"Oh." Wilbur grabs his phone and walks to the vending machine. He taps his card and two little bags with duck feed in them fall out. He picks them up, and throws one at Tommy.

He catches it with little struggle, and glares at Wilbur. Wilbur gives a toothy grin back.

There's no hesitation in the actions and that makes something warm and fuzzy in Tommy's stomach seem a bit more relevant.

With a sigh, Tommy throws a handful of feed at the ducks. They quack and try to race each other so they can shovel feed into their mouths as Wilbur laughs. He watches two ducks fight over one piece of feed for a bit, before looking at Wilbur.

Wilbur laughs, and gestures at two ducks pecking at each other. There appears to be no reason. "It's us!" Wilbur exclaims as one of the two ducks pecks at the other one, and the duck quacks offensively.

"We're like brothers," Tommy deadpans.

"Don't say that, I will cry."

"Not if I cry first, bitch."

Wilbur gives him a look, before shaking his head.

Tommy throws the feed at Wilbur who makes a noise, then ducks are attacking around his feet.

Wilbur screams a bit louder.

Tommy laughs, before shooing the ducks away with his foot and Wilbur glares at him. It's not a very angry glare, more just annoyance.

Still, Tommy gives a lopsided smile back. "Fuck you, bitch."

"Fuck off, gremlin."

"Okay, *Spectre*. " Tommy shakes his head. He isn't even Philza Minecraft, the only man ever.

Wilbur throws feed at Tommy and it hits him in the forehead. "Why'd you say it like that?"

" *Spectre*. "

"How are you fucking speaking in italics?" Wilbur throws feed out to the ducks who quack at each other then at Wilbur.

Tommy shrugs. "Because I hate men."

"What does that mean?" Wilbur sighs, and then pelts a bunch of duck food at Tommy. Tommy just blinks and takes it all in stride, he shakes his head slightly as the ducks peck at his feet. "How are you not-"

"Bitch, I have had literal rocks thrown at me," Tommy gestures at the ducks that are trying to eat off his shoes to get some slightly more food. It's not comfortable, but it sure as fuck isn't uncomfortable. "I can handle some ducks."

"You've had rocks thrown at you?"

“Kids are cruel.” Tommy shrugs. Which is true. Kids are cruel, and Tommy was always the youngest in his class (by three years) and therefore the smallest. “I was pretty small.”

Wilbur blinks at him. “Oh.”

“Don’t exactly have a happy childhood,” Tommy snorts, and that’s putting it mildly. “My parents are very dead.”

Wilbur looks horrified.

“You’re allowed to laugh, that’s kinda the point. I laughed at their funeral.”

“W-what?”

Tommy shrugs again, because that’s easier than explaining what the fuck happened to him. “It was funny.”

“You terrify me.”

“Good,” Tommy looks at his nails, “I should.” It’s not even that much of a lie.

Wilbur sighs, “Okay angst gremlin, feed the ducks.”

“Ducks are so cool,” Tommy sighs looking at all the multi-colored ducks that have surrounded them. It’s almost wholesome, with them quacking and Wilbur looking at the ducks with a fond smile on his face. “Have you ever eaten a duck, Wilbur?”

Wilbur looks up from the ducks and stares at Tommy. “Pardon?”

“Have you ever eaten a duck, Wilbur?”

“I... probably?” Wilbur pulls a face, “I haven’t actively- can we not talk about this while we’re surrounded by cute ducks.”

“Admit what you did,” Tommy deadpans, “Admit what you did to their parents.”

“Tommy.”

“Admit you coward, before I get Twitter on you.”

Wilbur straightens up immediately and stares at Tommy with wide eyes. “You wouldn’t,” he whispers, “Tommy, not Twitter. Please, please, they already have it out for me-”

“Don’t kick vigilantes off roofs then.”

Wilbur’s mouth snaps closed and he glares at Tommy.

Tommy pokes out his tongue.

“Oh you gremlin,” Wilbur says and lunges.

Tommy shrieks (very manly) and stumbles back. The ducks quack and move out of the way sounding mildly offended about the situation. Tommy shrieks again and he jumps over a bench and lands on his feet.

Looking over his shoulder he sees Wilbur pursuing him.

Fuck that. He was winning this game.

If he revealed himself as Theseus trying to win, fuck it he'd deal with that later. Tommy broke out into a run again, he scampered up a tree with what must be a shocking amount of fluidity because Wilbur stares at him wide-eyed.

“Are you a fucking spider?”

Tommy just smiles, “Am I?”

“How the fuck did you—” Wilbur stutters for a moment, looking wide-eyed. “What are you?”

“An idiot,” Tommy mutters, then throws himself out of the tree. He lands on his feet, then does a roll (that parkour practice has come into use) then he lays on the grass for a moment longer.

Then he flips off Wilbur who is rushing over.

“Tommy!”

“Fine,” Tommy deadpans, “All my bones are in one piece. I have bouncy bones, being a child and all.”

Wilbur opens his mouth to say something, to respond.

Someone shrieks, and it sounds like it's more from laughter than anything else. They both look up. A girl... who somehow looks ancient and like a literal child has a phone pressed to her ear.

She sighs loudly. She has kinda orange hair, but it looks a bit brown too. It's around her shoulders. "No, no, no, I'm not old. I'm younger than you, what the fuck are you on about—" there's a sigh.

Tommy looks at Wilbur.

Wilbur looks at Tommy.

"We get it, I'm old. Ancient. Shut the fuck up before I dox you— no healing arc for you. Banned."

"Oi! Lady."

Said lady pauses, and turns around, the hatred of a million suns in her eyes. "What the fuck do you want?"

"You look almost as old as Philza Minecraft."

Wilbur makes sputtering noises and holds out his hands in front of him. Mostly as a defensive method it seems, "Sorry!" Wilbur squeaks, apparently a slightly scary child can put Spectre out of commission. "He's just... himself."

The girl looks at both of them, flips off Tommy and turns around. Hair flipping over her shoulder in a way that is a little bit cool. Tommy will not admit that.

"I'm third wheeling!" The girl screams, seemingly excited about... third wheeling? And then she speeds off with the pace that she arrived with. "No, stop talking about my mum. Don't try to screw my mum—"

Tommy and Wilbur stare at each other for a moment, before both bursting into laughter. Tommy wheezes, and Wilbur clutches at his side.

They both, just laugh, very loudly. Into the park, some of the parents look at them with judgement, but Tommy ignores them in favour for slapping his leg and just fucking, wheezing.

“She—” Wilbur laughs, almost like a schoolgirl. He almost fucking giggles about this entire situation. “Reminds me— that vigilante that Techno likes... the one who keeps doing arson? Y’know?”

Tommy nods his head, “Yeah, yeah. What’s her name... Twilight? Like the My Little Pony ___”

“Probably a furry,” Wilbur adds.

“Almost certainly,” Tommy nods.

Wilbur rolls his eyes, before settling on the bench and looking at Tommy with an amusing mix of exhaustion and fondness.

"How did you have that much energy?" Wilbur mutters, "You're worse than Floof."

"I do not appreciate Floof slander in my neighbourhood," Tommy murmurs, it's very slurred and he's quite sleepy.

Laying in the sun like a fucking cat will do that to people. He curls up on the grass slightly more, it feels cool against his head, almost nice.

Wilbur nudges him with his foot.

Tommy makes a noise not too dissimilar to a cat. He hisses slightly and Wilbur laughs and prods him again.

"Tommy. Tommy. Tommy. Tommy." He's kicking him everytime he says that, but Tommy is too relaxed to care. "Tommy. Toms. Thomas."

Tommy rolls over, before looking up at Wilbur lazily. He blinks a few times and Wilbur looks down at him.

"Mmm?"

"You're a bitch," Wilbur says and all Tommy does is groan and roll back over, so his face is pressed against the cool grass.

The park in Logstechire isn't this well cared for, it's cared for well it's one of the only green spaces the area has. It's just... not this meticulously looked after. Flowers seem cut perfectly.

Everything seems too perfect. Which makes little sense, but is how Tommy feels about the entire situation.

The paths are too clean. It's all too nice, like no one has ever really been here and taken a chip out of the pavement.

There's not even many families around. Peppers Park is normally almost bursting at the seams in summer, with people taking advantage of the lake and the grounds and the playground. It's not exactly empty, or clean.

Tommy closes his eyes, feeling even more tired than usual on the grass.

He has no clue if he dozes off or not, only that the sun is a bit lower when he actually opens his eyes. And that Wilbur is sitting on the bench with his phone, he blinks at Tommy. “Oh. C’mon we gotta go.”

Tommy rubs his eyes, and sits up.

“Aw,” Wilbur coos and Tommy sends as much hatred towards him as he can. “Tommy!” He says in a voice that Tommy hates more than... men. “Awww, did little Tommy have a nap?”

“I am going to break your bones,” Tommy mutters, and means just about every word of that. He yawns and stretches, before getting onto his feet. He yawns again and rubs at his eyes. Then he glares again.

The walk back to the tower is quiet. Tommy drags his feet along the concrete and Wilbur doesn’t say much. He’s just on his phone.

They get back to the tower, without anyone stabbing Tommy, which is pretty good. He yawns, rolls his eyes, and opens the door. It’s not opening right, it hasn’t for... a couple days. Despite there being repair guys here.

Kristin gives a wave, Tommy gives a wave back.

Wilbur brightens up straight away and almost sprints over to the desk. He puts an arm on the desk and grins. “So Kristin.”

“Wilbur.”

“Phil is very rich.”

Kristin raises an eyebrow, “Where is this going?”

“Wouldn’t you like to be rich, Kristin? Think about it,” Wilbur pauses like he’s thinking about it. “Benefits. You are rich. Downsides... taxes, but we can get around that.”

Kristin gives him a look. “Are you calling me a golddigger?”

“No!” Wilbur exclaims and slams his hands on the desk, Kristin just covers her mouth and laughs. “That’s the problem, you could be, think of it Kristin. You buy a house, then Philza Minecraft dies in some tragic accident. Oh no... guess you get his fortune.”

Kristin gives him a look. “Instead of you? You know... his son.”

“Yup!” Wilbur grins. “Kristin please, he’s very rich and very lonely.”

“I... how does one even respond to that?”

“Marrying Phil?” Tommy adds. Both of them look at him. “What? My roommates are getting married for the tax benefits when they’re older... not that I told you that. No, we love paying taxes! In fact we pay extra tax before that’s how much we love the government that put us in crippling poverty!” Tommy grins.

Kristin looks just a bit horrified, Wilbur looks far more horrified and Tommy shrugs.

“Poverty!” He yells again with enthusiasm. “We love choosing between eating and heating! The answer to that is heating, just for reference.”

Wilbur look... yup, fucking horrified. Kristin looks just as horrified, which is fucking hilarious. Suddenly you throw some realities in rich people’s faces and they suddenly start thinking more about their money.

“Apart from in the summer,” Tommy continues, not intending to help his case. “Then food. Just open some windows.”

Wilbur blinks at him. “You don’t... have air conditioning?”

“Sometimes,” Tommy shrugs, “Depends on if it’s working or how much money we have.”

Wilbur blinks at him.

Kristin just smiles brightly. It’s not even fake, just amused.

Wilbur grabs Tommy’s arm and gestures towards the elevator. “We got places to be, jobs to do, crimes to commit.”

“Theseus be like...” Tommy mutters and Wilbur hits him in the back of the head. “What? You kicked him off a building, I’m allowed to be salty about this shit.”

They approach the elevator.

They both get in. Then stand there.

They look at each other.

“I’m not pressin’ the button,” Tommy announces.

“Well I’m sure as fuck not.”

They both stand there. Looking at each other. Before Wilbur relents and presses the button.

“Fine.”

The elevator hummed, Tommy crosses his arms and glares at the door.

Wilbur stands quietly next to him.

“So.” Wilbur says, breaking the silence. Because of course he does. Tommy resists the urge to roll his eyes. But he does anyway, because he’s not great at suppressing his microexpressions and probably will never be great at it.

With a sigh, Tommy looks at Wilbur. “What?”

“Do you really not have heating?”

“We do,” Tommy sighs, rolling his eyes, “We make enough now between the three of us—” he pauses and looks at Wilbur, he’s honestly not planning on mentioning Tubbo’s various illegal activities. “For a while it was a bit touch and go.”

Wilbur nods, and the door opens.

The oh so familiar space is there. The kitchen, the huge windows that look across the rest of the city. Which is frankly quite amazing, he hasn’t looked at it much. There’s the living area, which is also open to any of the others who work on this floor... but Tommy’s ever seen SBI here.

(Wait, that’s a lie. Once Tommy saw some of Dream’s PR people here, they took all the hot chocolate and Wilbur had complained about it for like a day afterwards. Not on Tommy’s list of things he appreciated too highly.)

The living area is nice, with a good couch, TV, and a nice glass coffee table. There’s also a bright blue rug that Wilbur seems to hate more than anything, it’s almost funny.

Then the branches of the offices.

Techno's asleep on the couch, snoring.

Phil is nowhere in sight, which means that he's probably in his office, probably just vibing. Phil didn't tend to do a lot of work, he just passed it all off to the minimum wage workers. Which... honestly is quite rude, but Tommy would probably do the same if he could.

But no, apparently everything gets passed to him eventually. Tommy is not supposed to be doing paperwork, but that's what he fucking did yesterday because all his coworkers are fuck heads.

Tommy takes a deep breath, before stomping over to the kitchen. There's never a lot in there, but Tommy finds an apple and eats it anyway. Mostly out of spite, but he's also hungry and glaring at Wilbur.

Wilbur responds by flipping him off, and Tommy doesn't react.

It's... weird the sort of normalcy they've fallen into. Even if Techno refuses to speak to him. Something about it all feels familiar, and normal, and Tommy is more than happy to fall into that routine again.

For a bit they sit on their phones, not saying anything, because there isn't a lot to be said.

Then Techno makes a noise, and Tommy drops his phone onto the counter, before picking it up and shoving it into his back pocket.

Wilbur pauses too, looking over to where Techno appears to still be sleeping.

“Oh.” Wilbur says, like that gives Tommy any clues to what is happening, he looks at Tommy. Then at Techno. “Okay, stay back, this could get messy.”

“What?”

Wilbur walks around the couch, before standing next to Techno. “He’s having a nightmare... a bad one it appears,” Wilbur takes a deep breath and holds one of his arms out in front of him like it’s a shield.

Tommy gets off his stool, ready to... he doesn’t really know what he’s going to do.

Wilbur stalls for another second, apparently not looking forward to this.

He then shakes Techno.

The reaction is immediate and terrifying.

Techno throws out an arm, and Wilbur is thrown back. There’s the noise of glass shattering and someone hitting the ground.

Tommy basically vaults over the couch, and stands there for a moment.

Wilbur’s on the ground, surrounded by broken glass. Techno looks like a murder is about to take place, and it’s going to be Wilbur’s.

So Tommy does what any smart person would, and screams. “Phil!”

Techno swings for Wilbur, and Wilbur rolls across the glass in a way that can not be comfortable.

Tommy stares in horror for a moment longer, his mind trying to catch up with what's happening.

As that's happening Techno picks up the leg of the now smashed coffee table and raises it over his head.

Wilbur's eyes go wide.

There are frantic running footsteps and Phil skids out into the room, takes note of the situation and his wings spread out either side of him. He lands in front of Techno, before snatching the table leg out of his hands and throwing it aside.

Phil tackles Techno to the ground right before he can get his hands on Wilbur again, holding him back with his arms by the armpits.

Wilbur jumps back, agitated, holding his now bleeding hand close to his chest. Still, he positions himself in front of Tommy protectively, blocking Techno's vision of him.

Techno kicks and flails, teeth bared and murder in his eyes, his short hair is messy as he tries to headbutt Phil to break free. He yells in anger when he's unable to.

"Techno— Techno calm down! What's going on?!" Phil asks just as worried as frantic, bringing his legs around Techno's torso to hold him in place.

The only response he gets is a mix of yells and weird sounding grunts before Techno doubles his efforts and Phil lets him slip a bit.

Techno gets his arm free and reaches out to attack Wilbur despite the distance and then Tommy's moving before he has the chance to process it, pulling Wilbur back and hurrying to hold Techno's free arm down.

Techno snarls at him, trying to bite him and get his arm free.

Tommy doesn't let go, he holds onto his arm as tight as he can. Despite Techno trying to fucking bite him.

Then Techno headbutts him, Tommy yelps and lets go of Techno, holding a hand to his nose and all he thinks about for a moment is the pain.

Yup. There's blood.

This is gonna be difficult to explain to Tubbo and Ranboo.

Wilbur moves between Tommy and Techno, before gripping onto Techno's free arm.

Phil pulls him back and almost tips back, his hold now obviously painful with the way Techno whines and cries out like a caged animal, his shoulder cracks and the arm Wilbur is holding stops moving but his legs' kicking gets more desperate, like now he's genuinely fighting for his life.

He cries out in agony, tears streaming down his face, as desperate as his movements "Phil-!" he hiccups, scared, terrified "Phil— Please, it hurts, dad!" he sobs. "Let me go!" He shrieks.

Phil moves his arms so he's holding Techno around the chest, similar to a hug and Techno's still moving arm immediately goes to clutch his leg before gripping Phil's arm around his chest in what seems to be an attempt to ground himself.

Techno makes a sobbing noise.

Wilbur lets go of Techno and turns so he's facing Tommy. He clicks in Tommy's face and Tommy glares.

"Hold your nose," Wilbur says, "Tilt forwards."

Tommy does what Wilbur says.

"Let me go!" Techno screams, "Phil— Phil— please!"

Tommy's focus is on Techno again, and Wilbur holds out his arm. Whether that's to stop Tommy from moving forwards, or Techno from attacking the both of them again, he doesn't really know.

Phil doesn't say anything.

Wilbur seems to understand something that Tommy doesn't, because he stands up and grabs Tommy.

Techno is screaming bloody murder muttering things that Tommy can't make out, but they might as well stab him in the gut because they're just... desperate, and so, so loud.

Tommy is pushed into the elevator and the both of them take a deep breath, before Tommy turns to actually look at Wilbur's injuries.

They get into the elevator and Wilbur takes a deep breath. There are cuts across his hands, and arms, there's one on the side of his head and there's a bit of glass in his hand. Tommy grabs his phone from his pocket, and takes a moment to look at his own injuries. His nose is bleeding pretty heavily...

He doesn't care a lot of that, but all he can think about is Techno's terrified screaming. It was... confronting.

Wilbur looks at him, and sighs, a sigh which is too tired for him to have. “Sorry about that. Please don’t sue us.”

“I won’t...” Tommy doesn’t mean to let his sentence trail off, but it does anyway. His mind is... going through a lot right now, mostly the heart wrenching screams. “What... happened?”

“Nightmare,” Wilbur closes his eyes, like saying the words were difficult. “They don’t get this bad often,” he reaches up and touches the cut on the side of his face, huffing slightly. “He thinks he’s back... there and just starts attacking.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah.”

“Will Phil... be okay?”

Wilbur shrugs, “Techno won’t hurt him.”

“Won’t he?”

“Nah,” Wilbur doesn’t look sure though, “Well... it’s complicated.”

“I— huh?”

“It’s complicated,” Wilbur finishes.

That’s helpful.

Tommy decides that this is something to deal with later.

Instead the elevator opens and they're on the medical floor.

A familiar dog looks at them, so much judgement in his eyes.

Floof. The man himself. Tommy's favourite dog.

The dog stares at him.

Before starting into a run and hitting into Tommy's legs, he yaps excitedly before pausing and looking at Wilbur. Wilbur and Floof get into... a staring contest, because of course they do.

Floof wins.

Someone approaches them, asking what happened and proceeding to take the pair of them over to a bed.

Tommy feels... a bit numb about the whole thing. He feels like... not great.

Wilbur does all the talking and Tommy doesn't complain because he's... not coping well, by any standards it appears. Tommy's tired, and watches Wilbur explain the situation, as glass is picked out of his hand.

Eventually Phil shows up, he looks tired, but cheerful.

“Tommy.”

“Phil,” Tommy smiles.

“How are you?” Phil asks, actually concerned, it was shown in his eyes. “Is your nose okay?”

“It’s fine,” Tommy says and means it, “I’ve had worse.”

That makes Phil look just as concerned, but for other reasons. “Glad you’re okay,” Phil says, before looking at Wilbur.

Wilbur who had a small jar with the piece of glass in it, Wilbur grins and shakes it, like a child would a rock in a jar. “Phil, look!”

“I’m lookin’.”

“How’s the coffee table?” Wilbur asks, sounding a bit hopeful. “In pieces?”

Phil nods.

Wilbur whoops and throws his arms up in the air. “Finally! It was so ugly.”

“I liked the coffee table,” Tommy mutters, and crosses his arms.

“Me too,” Phil mutters. “Jesus.”

“How’s Techno?”

“Asleep.”

“Is that a good idea?”

“No clue,” Phil rubs his face, he looks just... so much more stressed. “Techno’s having a breakdown, you’re... going to have one soon and Tommy. Tommy, you’re the only stable one right now.”

Tommy makes a noise, “I wouldn’t say that.”

Phil sighs, and it’s a little bit heartbreaking how tired Phil sounds. “Okay... cool, I need some forewarning for breakdowns.”

“That’s an actual rule,” Wilbur looks at Tommy, apparently explaining the context. “If you’re gonna crash, you gotta tell Phil before, if you can. Techno’s gonna be in trouble.”

Phil sighs and sits down on one of the beds, even his posture seems to say that he’s just... so, so tired.

Wilbur stands up, “I’m going home. Call me if you need anything.”

“Always,” Phil mutters, and just like that Wilbur leaves.

Phil sits there for a moment longer, eyes slightly far away, and he’s clearly not thinking about trying to make awkward small talk with Tommy. But that’s alright. Phil is just so tired, and Tommy feels... more than responsible for that.

“Phil,” Tommy says.

Phil looks up and focuses back in. “Yeah, Tommy?”

“It might not be worth a lot, but I think you’re doing a really good job. Just in general, calming Techno down, making sure Wil and I were alright.”

Phil smiles, it’s a bit sad, but also hopeful. “Thank you Tommy. Really.”

“No problem,” Tommy grins.

Phil sighs, “You’re a good kid.”

And... Tommy feels guilty all again. This is his fault, this is kind of all the result of his making a terrible decision. Now Techno’s... not going well, and Phil isn’t apparently coping very well. That also makes Tommy wants to scream.

This is his fault. It’s dumb to say otherwise— he was the one who went to sell Techno back, he was the one who started a snowball effect which turned into this—

His phone buzzes.

Tommy picks up his phone, feeling slightly numb. The notification is there... pretty easy to see on his phone.

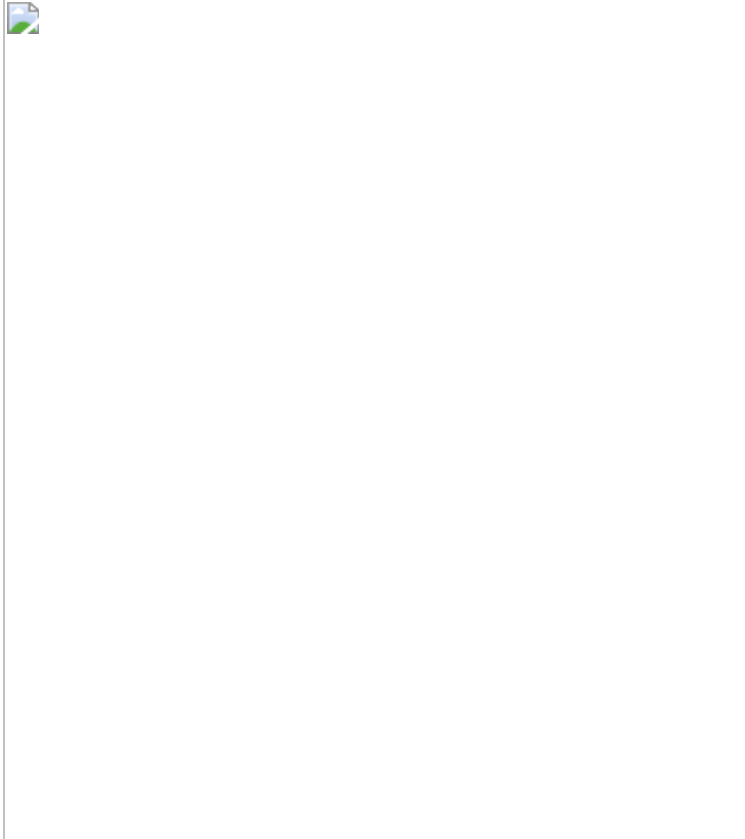
‘The Blade Found Passed Out In An Alley.’

He opens the article, it’s a photo of... Techno passed out in an alley covered in blood, and Tommy is willing to bet that it’s his blood from that night at the warehouse.

Something about that makes him feel sick.

And now on top of all this shit, Tommy has to fucking deal with a PR nightmare.

He can already see the hashtag trending.



Chapter End Notes

Summary:

Tommy's life continues. Quackity introduces him to "Daniel Grey" who is just Purpled with a fake identity who is here for "personal business". Then going back to his office, he sees Techno who promptly passes out spilling coffee all over Tommy. Phil tells

Tommy to go get some merch and makes Wilbur go with him. Which leads to some merch shenanigans. (Feel free to draw that). Wilbur gets bored and they go to a park. They feed some ducks, Twilight (the beloved) gets a cameo and play a game of tag that Tommy wins easily.

They get back to the tower. Techno has a nightmare. Wilbur wakes him up and Techno attacks Wilbur. Phil ends up basically holding Techno back, as Wilbur and Tommy go to the medical floor. Phil rocks up a bit later, and Tommy and him have a (short) bonding moment.

Join the [discord](#)! It's fun!

Fun fact for you all: This was so much fluffier until I (Ellis) got my hands on it. You can tell, Chapter 4 was the first one I wrote for, because the tower is attacked and Tommy gets blamed! So... thank me for the angst that you have got and will get!

That Time Techno Had A Struggle

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Blood, vomiting, minor body horror, medical talk, hospitals, sedation, talks of the warehouse incident, talks of drugs (medication).

There's a summary at the end for anyone who wants to skip (or for anyone who wants to refresh what happened in the chapter again.) Hope y'all enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Techno winces, he bit the inside of his cheek again. With a sigh, he puts down the toast and rests his head against the table. This was not a good day. This really, really was not a good day. Between everything that's happened today, this truly is the worst thing that's happened. And he's trending on Twitter... not for a good reason too.

There's blood in his mouth. Techno resists the urge to throw himself out a window. Why the fuck are the insides of his cheeks battlegrounds at the moment? His teeth aren't even that sharp.

He stretches and sighs. This is on the list of his worst days. Not in the top ten, but it appears to come pretty fucking close. He passed out, had a nightmare, attacked Wilbur, and now his mouth is bleeding.

He looks at the now cold toast on the plate in front of him, it somehow looks as sad, if not sadder, as he is. He picks it up, staring at it, half wishing it'd eat itself, when it doesn't he just puts the plate on the floor for Floof to eat.

He makes his way to the bathroom, almost dragging himself across his apartment. He bends over the sink and spits the blood into it, opening his mouth and looking at the mirror to see the damage. He tilts his head back to see better in the lighting, using his finger to carefully open his mouth wider.

There are cuts on the insides of his cheeks and the inside of his upper lip, the closer he looks the weirder the image becomes, his canines look larger and sharper, they appear to be growing bigger and outwards. He closes his mouth with a click of his teeth and winces when he bites his cheek again.

It's probably the lighting.

He spits the remaining blood in the sink and leaves the bathroom, instinctively running a hand through his hair, stopping short when he feels the uneven ends of it by his shoulders. He closes his hand at the tips of his hair, frozen in place, the phantom feeling of something that used to be there bringing a strange feeling of longing to his chest.

Being trapped in a cage. The roar of crowds. Screaming around him. Blood. Warmth. The relief in surviving another day.

His thoughts are interrupted by a knock on the door, making him release the pulling grip he didn't even know he had on his hair, his body springing into action at any possible distraction as he moves to open the door.

He picks up one of his jackets as he looks through the peephole, prepared to make an excuse about leaving if he had any unwanted guests, grip strong on the doorknob if there were any reporters that planned to break into his house. Again.

He sighs in relief when all he sees is Phil patiently waiting to be let in. He puts the jacket down and unlocks and opens the door, stepping aside silently to let Phil in.

Phil gives him a smile that has the hint of a grimace behind it. If he looks as much of a mess as he did when he looked in the mirror then it's understandable.

Phil's eyebrows furrow as his expression morphs into one of concern "You have blood in your mouth."

“That’s one way to start a conversation. Hello to you too.” he retorts back, cleaning his mouth with his hand.

“Why’s there blood in your mouth?”

“Again, hello to you Phil,” he states monotone and closes the door behind him, gesturing Phil over to the couch as he starts the familiar process of making coffee like he does every time Phil comes over.

“Yes, hello Techno. Why’s there blood in your mouth?”

“Been biting the inside of my cheeks a lot lately. Accidentally. I couldn’t do this much damage consciously.” he explains slowly, trying to make Phil calm down. He seems more worked up than usual. Which... There’s a good reason for that.

Phil looks confused “How does that happen?”

Techno shrugs, acutely focusing on the humming coffee machine in front of him as to ignore the anxious feeling in his chest. “Maybe I’ve been chewing my cheek without noticing and then bite it accidentally, I don’t know.” he reasons, more with himself than with Phil.

He hears Phil hum behind him, and that’s that, that’s the end of the conversation.

They stay silent as Techno hands Phil his mug of coffee, a comfortable sort of silence where they both understand each other’s needs at the moment. That is until Techno once again runs his hand through his hair and once again stops at the uneven ends.

“Phil,” he speaks before his brain can catch up, shrinking onto himself slightly when Phil looks at him expectantly “Can you..” he clears his throat, gesturing to his hair “Can you cut my hair?” he feels weirdly embarrassed asking this.

He knows why, he's putting himself in a vulnerable position if Phil says yes. Not only will he have sharp scissors so, so close to the back of his neck but he'll also be admitting that he's weak.

That he's weak and out of control and can't even fix his own hair. It's not that hard he can do it himself, it's not like he's never cut his hair by himself. It's a dumb thing to ask. He opens his mouth to respond again—

“Sure mate,” Phil says, he looks surprised. That Techno's even asked him. Which, in hindsight, is understandable. Ever since he's known Phil he hasn't even let the man close enough to his hair to touch it, well, most of the time anyway.

Phil puts his mug down and gestures to the bathroom.

Phil drags a chair into the bathroom, not very gracefully.

Techno follows close behind, posture tense but steps light.

Phil sets down the chair in front of the mirror, before looking at Techno, then at the chair. An invitation to sit, or an invitation to hit someone with the chair.

He does that, sitting down in the chair.

Techno looks around. Weapons. The chair could be used— he has a glass shower door he can push someone into. There are two pairs of scissors in the top draw. He can use the drawers as weapons. There's plenty of things to throw.

There's some rustling before Phil grabs a pair of scissors from the drawers. Okay... one pair of scissors in the drawer now.

Techno almost flinches at the snipping behind his head, the feeling of strands of hair being cut bringing back memories that make him clench his fists on his lap.

After a moment of silence Techno speaks up "You know... I almost ended up being in the same situation Wilbur was in..."

Phil's breath stutters but Techno almost doesn't notice "But I didn't." he states quietly "He risked his life to get me out of there, even if it wasn't his plan initially."

He takes a deep breath "I understand why Wilbur is so terrified of vigilantes, more now than ever." he pauses, listening to Phil's snipping "But." Phil freezes.

"Theseus is a good kid, despite everything, he's trying his best." then, more quietly he whispers "He's just a kid."

Silence fills the room. "Maybe I'm wrong, maybe this kid only saved me for his own benefit but speaking as someone who would've done the same, between you and me, Phil," he looks at Phil's widened eyes through the mirror.

"I don't believe that possibility."

Techno ran a hand through his hair, it's short... and weird, he does it again. His head's lighter, it's nice to not have to lug his hair around with him. "The kid almost died," he eventually manages. "I think... he let himself get beat up. I think he thought he deserved it."

The struggle on Phil's face says everything. Between his father-side and between his vigilante-hating side, they were fighting and Techno shrugs, balling his hands into fists on his lap. Phil opens his mouth, closes his mouth, and runs a hand down his face.

"That's... fucked," Phil eventually manages, but it sounds slightly fake and forced.

Vigilante-hating side won out then.

Techno nods. "There's camera footage... I deleted it. He just... let it happen, for so long and then he was screaming and begging for his life and oh god-"

Techno chokes off a sound of sadness his throat was wanting to make- had had the urge to make those sound the last few days- and just clears his throat "If I had to guess," he avoids eye contact "he's either fifteen or sixteen."

He clenches his fists harder in anger, uncaring of how his sharper than ever nails were digging into his skin "And he just let it happen- He walked towards that motherfucker and didn't attack, he just-" he frowns "He just took it."

Phil seems to be trying to ignore the way this was just a kid, his expression almost indifferent "Why would he do that?"

"Because he thought he deserved it! He almost handed me back to The Pit and felt guilty!"

"What if he just took the beating to manipulate you?" Phil asks, concern genuine in his voice.

Boy, Techno almost punches his almost father figure in the face. He restrains himself from admitting he knows who Theseus is, instead clenching his fists harder and answering "I'm an adult, an adult with trust issues who wouldn't trust someone I know is a bad person. This kid," he looks back at Phil, fury in his eyes "this kid broke my trust, yet he's working to gain it back and I know how he is, he's determined and stubborn and will do anything to redeem himself."

He pauses "Even if it costs his life."

Phil doesn't say anything, and Techno turns around so he's facing him. Phil's face is... conflicting, to say the least, on one hand, the father side, on the other side, is Phil hating vigilantes with every fiber of his being. Probably more than Wilbur.

Techno doesn't say anything for a moment, trying to figure out what Phil's thinking to no avail. "If that kid, took that beating, to manipulate me, then he deserves a fucking award. He should be dead Phil, did you know that? He should be dead. The injuries almost killed him. I used my powers—"

"Techno—"

"I know, that could've killed him," Techno finishes for Phil. He knows. He knows how unreliable his powers are, and that he hasn't had control over them since he was... very small. "I know. You don't need to tell me, I know Phil. You should've heard him... oh god..."

Phil just looks at him, "Isn't that enough of a sign to stay away? Look at what he did to you, Techno... please."

"He's a kid," Techno closes his eyes and takes a deep breath. "And he has no one to look up to, not while he's Theseus anyway. He doesn't have anyone to rely on Phil. Do you know, how easy it is for vigilantes to go down dark roads?"

He doesn't need to answer. They both know the answer to that question. Being a vigilante and going down a dark road is almost as common as robberies. It pays better. Vigilantes don't have anything but public opinion to hold them accountable.

Phil looks at him, something sad in his eyes. "Tech, please. I don't want a repeat of Wilbur."

"And maybe," Techno says, teeth gritted, "If there was a support system, then what happened to Wilbur never would've happened. You can't isolate people and then act shocked when the only people who want them are villains."

And like that, Phil's eyes are filled with anger. Techno isn't scared of Phil. He tells himself that, he has no reason to be scared of Phil. Phil has never done anything to warrant fear, but the stupid part of his mind screams that Phil is going to do something.

So Techno's heart leaps in his throat, despite the fact he knows that Phil won't do anything.

"You're... excusing it?" Phil's tone is low and deadly.

Techno doesn't back down, he's tired of being scared of people. "No. Never. But you can't isolate someone and then act surprised when that isolation turns into resentment. You can not pass laws to isolate and control vigilantes and then act shocked when they go to people who actually want them. That's not how this works. You don't pick and choose."

Phil takes a deep breath, and holds onto the chair, knuckles turned white and breathing slightly uneven. "I don't want you working with someone who hurt you."

There's so much hypocrisy in that statement. Techno has no idea where to start. "I'm an adult Phil, I don't care what you want."

"I don't want you hurt."

"I won't get hurt."

"Wilbur said that too," Phil says, voice breaking slightly. "I told him to stop hanging out with them... and he didn't. Did you know that Tech? And now I regret that I didn't do more. I will not have that happening with you. Theseus is dangerous."

Theseus is Tommy! Techno wants to scream, at the top of his lungs, so loud it hurts. He wants to tell everyone, every snide comment they've made while Tommy is around, he hears that. He hears that Wilbur and Phil essentially hate him. He hears that he's dangerous.

Techno will not have this becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy, he will not have Tommy becoming what everyone thinks he's going to become. He just... won't. Phil should know better, Wilbur should know better. But they don't.

And Techno just wants to scream. "Theseus is as dangerous as... Tommy," Techno says and pauses to look at Phil for a long moment, "Okay? Theseus is safe, he's a child. Phil. Have you ever heard a sixteen-year-old begging for their life?"

They both know what he's referring to.

"Yes," Phil says, tone clipped.

"Then you understand why Theseus is no more dangerous than I was."

Phil takes a deep breath, more pink hair falling around them. More snipping and Techno tried not to flinch away too much. But jumped a little bit. Phil paused for a moment, before continuing the hair cutting.

"You're an adult," Phil eventually says, his voice unsteady but firm. "You can make your own decisions."

"If I think Theseus is a threat, I'll hand him in," Techno sighs, "Really Phil... I know you don't believe me. But I think he's good."

"After what he did to you?"

"Yeah." Techno looks at his hair in the mirror finally, it is much less sloppy, Phil's actually done a pretty good job. He runs his fingers through the short strands, it still feels odd. But it's nice. "I think Theseus is a good person. Or trying to be, and that counts for something."

"Family comes first," Phil repeats and Techno rolls his eyes.

“I know.” And... he does know, that’s a huge part of the problem. Techno sighs again before standing up, he brushes off some of the hair on his shoulders and gives Phil a grin.

Phil rolls his eyes, before holding out his arms for a hug, one that Techno obliges to with no hesitation. Phil wraps an arm around Techno’s shoulder and Techno relaxes into the touch. Phil isn’t his dad... but he’s family nonetheless.

And the rest of that day is spent quietly. Techno sitting on the couch, Floof running around like a mad little thing with legs. Shedding dog hair everywhere, as Phil chases after Floof.

If Techno takes some photos of Floof outrunning Phil, then no one will need to know that. And if there’s now a photo of Phil laying on the ground with Floof sitting on his chest, then no one’s going to see that.

It’s very funny, to be frank.

After dinner, Phil sighs, complaining about patrol and Techno just wishes him good luck.

Eventually, Phil leaves.

Techno was supposed to patrol tonight, but he’s not.

So instead he decides to go to bed early. Taking off his prosthetic before collapsing into his bed. Facedown on the pillow, he stays there for a while as Floof is spinning around in a million circles trying to get comfortable.

“Floof,” Techno complains, into the pillow. “Stop spinnin’.”

Floof does not stop spinning on the bed.

Techno's trying to sleep, and honestly, Floof is not assisting with that. Floof yaps and Techno debates sleeping on the couch. Floof is the alpha male of this house, what he wants goes. He rolls over and puts Floof back on the floor.

Floof jumps up onto the bed.

Techno sighs and rolls back over. "Floof."

Floof yaps, like he's the one being inconvenienced here. Techno swats at Floof, who yaps in offense before finally settling down.

And Techno falls asleep.

Until he wakes up.

He wakes up in pain.

His leg is aching dully like it's been in pain for so long his muscles dull it. He sighs and sits up to retrieve his prosthetic to get his medicine from the bathroom, barely getting a grip on it before the pain spreads through his whole body.

He hisses, clutching his abdomen where the pain is strongest. It's a constant throb of pain, in time with his quickening heartbeat, gradually getting more painful the longer he stays still.

He stands quickly, almost losing balance when he remembers he doesn't have his leg yet. Okay, fuck, he does not have time to put the on prosthetic right now.

He leans on his bedside table to keep balanced as he thinks of what to do. Or at least, try to think of what to do.

The pain, it's bad, bad enough to blind him for a few seconds and almost send him straight to the floor.

As if the pain wasn't bad enough he starts shivering despite the burning the pain is causing, cold sweat rolling down the back of his neck.

His knee buckles and he almost falls to the floor again when his muscles spasm, an uncomfortable feeling spreading through his aching body when it doesn't stop.

He takes a deep breath, willing his mind to focus, just focus for a second. He shudders when all the sensations intensify tenfold and he feels something rising up his throat and into his mouth, leaving a terrible and metallic taste behind.

A gurgling sound leaves his throat as he doubles over, blood dripping down his mouth and clogging up his throat.

He can't breathe. He coughs, the motion scratching his throat painfully. It's no use, blood keeps spilling out, deeming him unable to take a breath.

He's sweating and his body feels like it's boiling but it's cold, it's so cold.

Blood keeps pouring out of his mouth at an alarming rate, then his stomach convulses and throat spasms and he's throwing up.

It's just blood, it's all blood and it hurts, his insides hurt, his body hurts and he can feel all his organs moving unnaturally. He coughs in the middle of it all, tears blurring his vision and feeling like they burn at his skin.

He grits his teeth when the throwing up stops, blood no longer clogging up his throat and he takes a gasping breath and coughs, mind hazy from the lack of air and blood pooling in his mouth.

He falls to the floor, his body buckling from weakness and he's on the mess he just made, gasping for air and spasming at the blinding pain inside him.

He wants to scream. It hurts, it hurts it hurts it hurts. It hurts so much.

He's going to die.

The tears come faster at that.

Not alone, anything but alone. He can't die here. He can't die after a somewhat messy fight with Phil, after promising Wilbur that he'd listen to his new songs. Not before being able to forgive Tommy and give him the role model he needs.

He sobs.

Something nudges at his foot and he almost lets out a yell of pain at that, every form of contact suddenly bringing blinding pain as he writhes on the floor, holding onto his burning chest.

The ringing in his ears almost drowns out the yapping of his dog.

Oh God.

He hopes Phil will take care of Floof.

There are noises around him, he knows that, but he can't hear them. There's ringing in his ears and after everything is he just going to be dying here?

The last thought he has is. *What is happening to him?* And then... he can't remember anything else.

He wakes up.

That confuses him to start with.

Everything is fuzzy, but nothing hurts. There's beeping next to him, and the painful white that's either a hospital or something worse. He blinks a few times trying to sit up before wincing at the pain that shot through his body.

Ah. Not great.

Worse. Hospitals.

He looks at his arm. Oh, there's an IV in there. That's not great, he'd rather not be there actually. He stares up at the roof for a moment, oh he's going to have some fun nightmares. Everything is fuzzy... too.

What's in that IV drip?

"Techno?" That's Niki's voice, he knows that, his head isn't that fuzzy. He groans and turns his head so he's looking in the direction of the voice. Niki is sitting on a chair, looking a bit stressed, with Floof in her lap. "Are you alright?"

Is he?

"Am I?"

"I heard you vomiting," Niki explains, and *oh* that's what happened. "You were... passed out in your own blood."

“Not the first time,” Techno mutters.

“What?”

“What?”

“What do you mean not the first time?” Niki asks, she looks very concerned. Floof is asleep on her lap, which is very cute. Floof is his favouritest dog ever, he’s so fluffy and violent. What a perfect dog.

“Floof,” Techno says, he reaches a hand out towards Floof. It doesn’t wake him up, which is quite rude. He’s also quite tired, maybe he deserves a nap. Something in the back of his head knows his thoughts are devolving into just chaos. Hey, at least Chat hasn’t rocked up again. They’ve been surprisingly quiet. “Floooooof.”

“Floof?” Niki asks, looking from the dog to Techno, “Are you okay?”

Techno looks at the IV, it is not a good sight. He does not like IVs, but he is not screaming and crying yet. So this is fine. Everything is fine. This is great, this is amazing. He’s having a great time. “What’s in this?” Techno looks at what it’s connected to, it’s red. Ew. It’s blood. Gross.

Blood. Huh. It’s not his.

He wants his blood back.

“They took my blood,” Techno mutters to the roof. “Niki, where’s my blood?”

“Uh... what?” Niki seems amused, which is quite rude because his blood is missing. “Your blood?”

“I lost it,” Techno mutters, devastated. “My blood. I need that. For personal reasons, my bedroom carpet does not need that blood. I need my blood. Niki, Niki, Niki, I want my blood back.”

Niki blinks at him, “Oh. Blood is good. You... need that.”

“Mhmm,” Techno yawns and turns his head to the side.

There’s shuffling and the door opens. Phil. Philza. Philza the best man ever, standing there in all his glory. Techno makes a noise, it’s Phil! Phil! Phil is cool, Phil is the best, and Phil is here.

Phil looks worried, he blinks at Techno. “Tech?”

“Philll. Hi,” Techno goes to wave but finds his arm is currently stuffed into an IV. Ah. That makes that more difficult. “Whatcha doin’ here?”

“What drugs did they give you mate, holy shit,” Phil walks over to the side of the bed. Looking at what one of the IVs is connected to. “How are you currently conscious?”

“Do we need to call a nurse?” Niki asks, she seems very concerned. It’s very sweet. Techno is glad she’s his friend, even if she never gives back the books that he lends her. “Is it concerning?”

“I just— how is he conscious?” Phil pulls a face and looks at Techno, Techno blinks at him. “Mate? How are you awake?”

“Resistant to most sleeping drugs,” Techno murmurs, “Because... yeah. I... yup! Trauma, that’s why.”

Niki snorts.

“Phil. Phil. Philza. Philza.”

“Yes?”

“I passed out,” Techno looks at the IVs again, he really, really hates IV’s. “Did they tell you? In my own blood apparently! That’s the fifth time that’s happened. And then they took my blood, I need that!”

“Um.”

“He’s been like this the entire time,” Niki says, and it is very fond. Reminds him of the tone that Wilbur uses when he’s talking about Tommy. “He is... very, very, high on pain medication now.”

“Right.” Phil sighs. “What happened?”

“His bedroom looks like a murder scene,” Niki explains easily, “He was vomiting blood and then passed out. The doctors took some blood samples, they’re thinking late power developments.”

Blood tests.

Not again.

Wilbur emerges through the door, carrying coffee cups and a bagel. He looks at Techno, obviously concerned. “Who attached him to an IV?”

“Nurses,” Niki says.

“That’s a terrible idea.” Wilbur says, “Techno, how are you awake?”

“Spite.” Techno announces, he looks at the IV again, panic lodging itself into his throat. He looks at the IV for a longer moment. Not again. Not again. He stares at it, for a long moment.

Cold tables. Cruel eyes.

He needs it out.

He needs the IV out.

Whatever they’re putting into his body means he can’t think straight. He needs to be able to think straight.

Techno sits up, grabbing onto the side of the bed to do so. It crushes underneath his hand, and he reaches for the IV. He needs it out, he really needs it out. He needs to get rid of the IV.

Niki moves so that she’s holding onto Techno’s arm. Techno tries to pull his arm away with no success. She holds his arm in place, and Techno makes a noise, it’s a pathetic noise. *Let him go, let him go.* Techno tries to get his arm free, to no avail.

Fine. Fucking fine.

He has teeth.

Niki appears to notice what's happening first. And she's the one that puts her forearm against Techno's neck. Not hurting him, but there's the threat of that. Techno tries to bite, tries to start screaming, to no avail.

"What are you doing?!" Wilbur yells, being held by the arm by a startled and obviously terrified Phil.

"Holding him down!" she yells back "What else am I supposed to do?!" She draws her arm away from his neck for a second, barely noticeable, then moves the palm of her hand so she's holding the side of Techno's head down with it.

"He's panicking!" Wilbur shouts, gesturing wildly to the heart monitor that's still somehow attached to his brother.

"Either he panics or seriously injures himself!" she shouts back, angry "You make that choice! Because I can let him go at any moment!"

Wilbur looks conflicted, glancing at his brother for a moment before quickly averting his gaze, seemingly unable to look any longer.

That doesn't drown out the sound of him crying and yelling and both Wilbur and Phil appear to be holding each other back from getting any closer and making the situation worse than it already is.

Then there are nurses running in, probably alerted by the yelling. They push Niki aside, quickly taking her place in holding Techno down. It takes more than two people to hold a single arm down.

"We have a code violet!" one of the nurses yells out, "Sedate him! We need to sedate him!"

Techno thrashes around, moving more frantically. “Code violet floor three, room four. Code violet floor three, room four. Code violet floor three, room four.” Comes from over a speaker, there’s a speaker?

Someone grabs him and Techno shrieks. He barely notices the security guards that come in until they come over and hold him down, moving his head to the side and pushing it down similarly to how Niki had.

From the corner of his eye, he sees Phil, Wilbur, and Niki being ushered out of the room and almost sobs at the sight. Tears fill his eyes as desperation sets in.

Don't leave!

Niki! Phil! Wilbur!

Drift! Don't leave!

Run!

They'll hurt you!

He tries sitting up, only to be held back down. Then someone holds their hands over his face, a cloud of bluish smoke coming out of it and he immediately knows what it is.

He tries to bite the hands, desperate to make them stop. He can't pass out.

He can't.

He'll be weak if he passes out. Who knows what they'll do?

He can't.

The security guards hold him down with more force, surely to bruise.

Think. Think!

If he breathes in, he'll pass out, if he holds his breath, he'll pass out too.

But he can't.

He can't.

"Please," he whispers out.

He feels his limbs getting weaker by the second until he can't move them anymore, and the guards slowly let go of him.

The heart monitor has been ringing for what might've been minutes now, the sound blending in with the ringing in his own ears.

He hears it start to beep again as someone connects it back to him. The sound is fast. Faster than it should be.

The hands are still in front of him and he breathes it in with ragged breath.

His eyes slowly close despite how much he tries to keep them open, the beeping of the machine echoing in his skull and becoming distant.

The last thing he hears before passing out once again, is the faint voice that comes through the speakers.

“Code violet clear. Code violet clear. Code violet clear.”

Eventually, the hospital decides a different approach instead of sticking an IV in him, because they don't want a repeat of *code violet* . Instead, he's sitting in an office. Floof on his lap as he runs his fingers through the dog's fur.

He's tense, and the doctor looks a little bit scared.

“So, we're going to look at your bloodwork,” the doctor says, “We don't believe any of this is normal, and we need to get to the bottom of it.”

Techno nods, running his fingers through Floof's fur. He'd say so.

“We have a couple of theories as to what may be happening,” the doctor explains, looking down at her clipboard. Before looking back at Techno. “We believe it is power related, for what that's worth... potential power mutations or a late power developing.” She smiles at Techno.

That's good then. Power related. He can handle that. It makes sense. Techno nods and gives a small smile back. “Sorry about... freaking out, earlier. I don't know if you were there for that or not.”

She nods, expression darkening slightly. “It's quite alright... hospitals can be triggering to many people, especially in a world like this. It happens quite a lot.”

She says that like it makes it okay. And something uncomfortable twists in Techno's gut.

Clearing her throat, she looks back down at her clipboard. "Feel free to live life as you normally would. Maybe skip off of hero duties for now, and we'll call you in when we know what's wrong. Okay?"

"Got it, thank you."

And now comes the waiting game.

The waiting game... which includes going to work, and reading a bunch of boring reports.

So many boring reports. Waiting for an answer. To... anything. To what the fuck has been happening to him.

Techno looks up from his desk at a knock on the door to his office. He watches as Tommy enters with a few files in hand. Techno tries not to flinch at the sight of him.

His fingers dig into the table and it cracks underneath his hand.

For a moment Techno just stares at the table, now there are eight finger marks in it. He stares at those finger marks.

What?

"—Phil told me to bring you these files you requested." Tommy doesn't look directly at him as he approaches his desk, speaking quietly only when he has to.

There's something different about Tommy's appearance, Techno squints slightly at him "Which ones are they?"

Tommy shrugs, putting down the files on his desk, slow with his movements as if he were dealing with a caged animal, Techno doesn't know whether to be mad about it or not.

Techno's eyes settle on the back of Tommy's head when the boy turns around, only now understanding what was missing.

His ponytail had been sloppily cut off, looking extremely similar to his own hair before he had asked Phil to fix it.

Techno freezes, confusion swarming in his head but warmth in his chest, he takes a deep breath.

"Tommy."

Tommy freezes momentarily, turning around to face Techno with scared eyes.

Techno simply gives him a small sad smile. "Thank you."

And the door closes with a quiet click. Techno stares after Tommy for a long moment. This was complicated.

He wants to hate him. Techno realizes. Sitting at his desk, surrounded by paperwork. He wants to hate Tommy, with every fiber of his being. He wants to despise Tommy, he wants to — feels something apart from this dull sadness that settles in his gut.

Really... hatred would be so much easier. He can work with hatred, we can work with anger and he can work with voices that he never wanted screaming to hurt people.

Whatever this is... sadness? Exhaustion? It doesn't make sense, he can't handle it.

Tommy betrayed him... kinda. It's complicated, he saw the kid almost die when he regretted it. He watched the camera footage which was now deleted and could not be found again.

It doesn't take an idiot to see how much that affected him, how little he's been sleeping, the nightmares, the shaking.

But Tommy regrets it. How can he hate that? How can he hate a child that regrets, almost died, and is just... so sorry.

He wants to cry. Just... so much. Tommy fucked up. That's plain. But he's sorry and he's a *kid*.

Techno sighs. He's a kid. That's the thing. A kid who probably has a load of trauma, a kid who probably doesn't know a lot and never had good examples.

Fuck. And he's going to have to be a good example.

To a kid he hates. Well no, he doesn't hate Tommy, because that would be too easy.

He feels bad for Tommy.

He feels a sort of awful... sympathy for Tommy. And that's worse, that's so much worse.

Despite that now he needs blood tests, he's breaking things without meaning to. He has theories, and Tommy is to blame for almost all of them. God... he wants to hate Tommy, that would be so much easier.

"Shit," Techno says out loud. "Shit!" He yells.

"Um." Wilbur pokes his head in, "You okay?"

"Having a crisis," Techno mutters.

"One I can help with?" Wilbur steps into the office. "You okay... you've been. Off recently."

Techno looked at him, expression blank. "I just relieved some of my most traumatic experiences and yesterday I passed out due to an undisclosed reason and I have about thirty tests being done on me at this moment. No. I am not okay."

"Oh." Wilbur sits down in the chair that's basically just there for him. "Well... I reckon all the testing will show nothing."

"Wilbur I was vomiting blood. My apartment is still being cleaned and tested."

With a wince, Wilbur shrugs one of his shoulders. It seems like a sympathetic and slightly apologetic movement. "Well, it's nothing to be worried about. It'll be fine."

Techno sighs, something hissing, and puts his head in his hands. "Fuck." He whispers. "I'm scared. Weird things have been happening to me—"

"Are you going through puberty?" Wilbur asks. "Again?"

"I— what no?"

"You sound unsure."

"I'm not going through puberty." Techno hisses.

"Good! If your voice gets much lower I'll have to commit a crime."

Techno groans. "Wilbur I am scared shitless and you are not helping."

"Sorry. What do you mean by weird things?" He leans forward slightly "Apart from the passing out in your bedroom."

"Wilbur... how strong am I?" He closes his eyes, feeling the finger marks on his tables. They weren't there too long ago.

Wilbur pauses and screws up his face. "Uh— last I can remember you could lift Phil and me on a board."

"So not strong enough to break a table with my fingers?"

"No?"

He moves his laptop aside, showing the eight fingerprint-sized dents on the table. Wilbur's mouth falls open.

"The fuck?" He screeches. "That can not be real—"

"It is."

"Oh shit," Wilbur whispers. "Is it late power development?"

"I think so?" Techno manages. "What else could it be? It makes sense for me, my powers are stunted at best."

Wilbur nods and stares again slightly. "Damn. Is there still hope for me?"

"No." Techno deadpans. "You have your compelling and transparency. I have... strength apparently and unreliable healing powers."

Wilbur snorts.

They fall into silence. "You'll be alright," Wilbur says, giving Techno a fond and bright look. "It's probably just late power development. Kinda like puberty."

"Twenty is late."

"It is," Wilbur confirms. "But not unheard of. Probably messes with adults more, because they ain't still growing. Y'know?"

Techno nods. "Thank you. Wil. Really."

"What else is family for?" Wilbur stands up. "Phil knows more about power development than I. Considering your— past, it makes sense for you to have late power development. Okay? Nothing to be worried about."

Techno nods, and sighs. "It'll be okay."

"Yeah."

"But—"

"Nope."

"Fine."

"See you at dinner, it's at mine tonight. Love ya."

"Love you too Wil." Techno rolls his eyes, before grabbing the papers on his desk. *Hybrids*. Just some light reading... really, that's all it is.

Anyway, Phil's a hybrid. It's polite to learn.

For a while, he reads, not thinking of much. Until he realizes. Wait, wasn't there a news story about Techno having passed out after the night of the warehouse?

He pauses. Putting down the papers.

How did Tommy spin that?

"Hey Henry," Techno asks in the open air.

"Yes?"

"Can you get Tommy here? Please?"

"Of course, how urgent is it?"

“Fairly.”

“Alright!” Henry announces, and Techno picks up his papers again.

It takes a few minutes, but Tommy emerges through the door. His hands are shaking slightly, and Techno notes that in the back of his head. Well... it’s nice to know that they were both terrified of each other.

“Yeah?” Tommy asks, his voice shaking slightly.

Something about Tommy being scared of him doesn’t sit right. He can’t exactly explain why. “Wasn’t there a news story... about me being passed out after the... warehouse?”

Tommy nods. “Yeah?” His voice cracks slightly.

“What did you say?” Techno asks, and Tommy stares at him wide-eyed. God... he’s just... so scared, and that hurts. “The cover-up?”

“Oh. You got drunk.”

Techno blinks at him. “Pardon?”

“I said that you got drunk? And... the blood was from being slimed, wild parties. After a rough patrol.”

Techno blinks at him for a long moment. “Tommy... I don’t drink.”

Tommy looks a bit surprised. “Well... what else was I supposed to say?”

He has a point. But Techno can already see the hashtags and the media fallout that he'd need to address eventually. Tommy shifts on his feet, and Techno picks up all the papers, before hitting himself in the face with them.

"I mean..." Tommy shifts again, "You can tell them what really happened... if you want?"

Techno gives him a look.

"Okay, okay, sorry." He looks down, "This has probably been more of an issue for me than you."

"And whose fault is that?" Techno snaps. It's harsher than he meant— well it's not. But it is, it's hard to explain.

Tommy nods, almost frantically, "Sorry. Yeah, it... yeah. Sorry."

Techno doesn't say it's fine. He's not a liar. Part of him wants to scream at Tommy, the other part of him wants to hug the kid. He's a kid. He is a *child* and of course, he didn't know better. That doesn't block out the urge to scream and throw things at Tommy.

"I'll be out of your hair now," Tommy says, very rushed and forced. As he rushes out from the room, closing the door with a slam.

Techno groans, running his fingers through his hair.

What the fuck is happening to him?

He stands up, the chair moves back a little too much.

He's going to get some food, some coffee, and start reading again.

He reaches for the doorknob and pulls.

There's crushing, and Techno stares at the doorknob which is now in pieces on his hand. He yelps, and drops the crushed doorknob onto the ground where it makes a noise, and Techno stares.

Then stares at his hand.

That's not normal. Surely?

What the ever-loving fuck is happening to him?

Chapter End Notes

Summary:

Technoblade notices that the inside of his cheeks is a battlezone and there's a bit of blood in his mouth, and he can't figure out why. Phil rocks up and notices that there's blood in his mouth. Techno (lies) and says it is fine, he asks Phil to cut his hair and they talk about Theseus. Phil is scared that history will repeat itself, and Techno says that it's fine, and he'll hand in Theseus if he has to.

Phil leaves, and Techno goes to bed. He wakes up in pain, which gets worse until he passes out and Niki finds him. He wakes up in a hospital, where he's a little bit off his face. Until he freaks out and starts fighting. That ends with him passing out.

The next day at work, Tommy rocks up. He gives some files, and Techno figures out that Tommy cut his hair too. Which is a very brotherly move. He leaves. Techno wants to hate Tommy but can't. Wilbur and Techno talk about what's

happening to him, and Wilbur basically says everything will be alright. After that Techno calls Tommy back with some questions about news stories that are circulating. Tommy answers, he leaves.

Techno goes to get food and a drink, he goes to open the door and the doorknob shatters in his hand. Which is odd...

HELLO! WELCOME BACK! Both A-Author and I wrote this chapter (good for us I know) and there were times that I would be writing and then they would add paragraphs and my bit would move down and I would get confused. Also Twilight (who got a cameo last chapter) tried messing with us but failed. (BECAUSE SHE'S A NOOOOOB /lh)

So that was a chapter... that's for sure.

What is happening to Techno? Feel free to put your theories below. Hope you enjoyed!

join our [discord](#) (if you want to) it's fun!

In Which Tommy Gets A Break (kinda)

Chapter Notes

Warnings: guns, light blood mentions, a nose gets broken and reset.

As always there is a chapter summary. For those of you with poor attention spans, wandering minds, or any other reason.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Tommy invited Purpled over on the weekend, he did not actually expect Purpled to show up. Which is why when on Saturday he was standing outside of Tommy's apartment looking incredibly awkward... Tommy was not expecting it.

Tommy blinked, the open door really said all it needed to say. Purpled stood there, wearing a black hoodie and jeans. It felt wrong to see him in anything but purple. A plain black hoodie, jeans and black shoes. It really felt wrong. He held a black backpack, apparently Purpled was on his emo arc.

Purpled shuffled on his feet. "You invited me."

"I did."

"I'm here."

"Normally you don't show up," Tommy justified, "I've invited you to hang out like normal people before."

Purpled shrugged. "I was busy."

"You left the country after I asked you last time."

"I had a job to do."

"You went on holiday!"

"I don't like people," Purpled muttered, hands still firmly in his pockets. He didn't look dangerous, but Tommy was willing to bet that he had a gun, several knives and probably a... firework somewhere.

Tommy rolled his eyes and stepped aside.

Purpled stepped into the apartment. He looked awkward.

Tubbo is sitting at the table, doing homework, papers spread everywhere. Ranboo was at work, which is quite rude.

"Tubbs, this is Purpled. Purpled that's my best friend Tubbo. He's doing English homework, we don't interrupt Tubbo trying to do English—"

"What do they mean!" Tubbo yells. "Comment on the themes of The Great Gatsby. I don't know?"

"The fragility of the American dream." Purpled deadpans, looking down at his shoes. "And misogyny."

Tubbo looks at him. Before scribbling something else. "What do you mean?"

"Class, romance and the American drive to want things. They all want money, each other, to be happy."

Tubbo's eyes went wide and he scribbled something down. He nods, before looking at Purpled. "You saved me."

"Uh." Purpled looks at Tommy, desperation in his eyes. "That's nice?"

Tommy laughs, watching his friend suffer at the hands of Tubbo. The sheer awkwardness of Purpled is forever funny.

With a nod, Tubbo went back to his work and Purpled somehow manages to look even more awkward. Which is funny.

It's just an apartment, and Purpled acts like he's never been in an apartment before. He looks around.

There isn't a lot to look at. There's the kitchen, which is filled with clutter but not messy. The dining table, and the couch and TV. There are three doors, two bedrooms and behind a door off the lounge room is the bathroom.

"Oh." Purpled says. "This is... smaller than I thought."

Tommy laughs before settling on the couch. He puts his feet up and grabs his phone. He looks at Purpled, who's still standing there awkwardly.

He raises an eyebrow. "You good Purp?"

Purpled nods, before sitting down. Posture perfect, and it's funny how incapable of relaxing Purpled is.

And Purpled starts tapping his foot. Looking straight ahead.

Tommy ignores it and starts playing a game on his phone. Purpled just needs a moment... or two to adjust. He's not very good at adaptation at the best of times.

It's quiet for a moment.

Tubbo groans. "Purpled, can you stop that?"

"No."

"Please."

"I literally can't." He keeps bouncing his leg. "It calms me down," Purpled glances at Tommy. "Why's your hair short?"

"Hmm? Oh." Tommy runs his fingers through his hair, he can't tie it in a ponytail anymore. It's much, much shorter. The side effect of having a breakdown and a pair of scissors, he felt bad that Techno had short hair and he didn't. (It's dumb he knows, but he can't stop what happened.) And then he cut his hair short.

Very short.

Okay it's not very short, it's fluffier now too. It looks like... Wilbur's hair now? Just a bit shorter at the sides. It's almost funny, he could maybe pass as Wilbur's brother now. If he tried hard enough.

"Cut it," Tommy replies, "Why aren't you wearing purple."

Purpled gives him a look, “I don’t just wear purple. I wear other colours.”

“Like?”

“... black,” he mumbled. “Okay, I didn’t want to wear purple today. I got a new hoodie.”

Tommy snorts, and rolls his eyes.

“Oi, Purpled.” Tubbo says, and Purpled looks up and slightly shocked. “Do you have your vigilante gear here? I wanna mess with it.”

“Uh... no thank you.” Purpled says, it’s grossly polite. “I don’t let people touch my gear.” And like that, that conversation is over, and Tommy wants to laugh about that. It’s quite funny to watch Purpled operate in the real world.

The world isn’t always beating people with bar stools, sometimes it’s sitting in a dingy apartment and watching a friend you trust with your life, talk to a friend you don’t trust with a knife.

That bit is true. Once Tubbo had a knife and then proceeded to get arrested. (He isn’t going to even start to explain that.)

Purpled glances at his backpack, almost nervously. Ah. His gear is in there then. Which is quite amusing for a reason that he can’t word. Purpled for someone who claims to be very competent and able, he seems to be a little bit of a disaster, and gives away his every emotion with details.

Tommy wonders if anyone’s ever hung out with Purpled enough that they got to know the small things, like how he glances around nervously and scans for every weapon, and probably knows the best way to kill all of them right now.

“What’s your power, boss man?” Tubbo asks.

“Accuracy.” Purpled mumbles, “I can’t miss.”

“Oh.” Tubbo blinks, “So you like guns?”

“Yes.”

“Can you shoot?”

“I don’t miss.”

“Will you teach me?”

“No.”

Tubbo deflates, glaring at Purpled. “I hate you.”

Purpled rolls his eyes, sitting back on the couch, he smirks, with a tonne of false confidence and Tommy tries not to laugh at it. It’s like a switch flipped in his head, and now he’s leaning back, looking all confident. Like about a minute ago he wasn’t terrified to just sit down. It was almost funny.

Tommy sighs, before reaching forward, he picks up the remote. Then glances at Purpled. Who has just... so obviously never played Mario Kart before. He looks at Tubbo, the two of them make eye contact, and Tubbo nods his head.

Purpled freezes up completely, his hand darts to his side, and then there's a knife out and pointed at Tubbo. Everyone knows that if Purpled threw it he wouldn't miss. To Tubbo's credit, he doesn't react beyond a tired sigh and rolling his eyes.

"Come on dude," Tubbo sighs, "I can't afford a funeral right now."

Purpled blinks. "What?"

"We're gonna play Mario Kart," Tubbo says easier, he walks to the TV and starts messing with wires. "We're not plannin' on taking you down. Tommy would've already messed with you."

"Huh?" Purpled squeaks, whipping around and looking at Tommy, eyes wide. "What does that mean?"

"Nothing." Tommy glares, shooting daggers at Tubbo's back. "Purpled... you've been my friend for longer than Tubbo. We have been in some... interesting spots—"

Purpled snorts, clearly remembering the same thing. He rolls his eyes, and leans more against the side of the couch. It's a slightly fond gesture, and Tommy can take that. He knows Purpled cares about him, it's quite obvious when Purpled has pulled him out and away from a stray bullet or knife.

Tubbo stands up, pausing for a moment, holding a controller in his hand. He throws one at Purpled, who catches it one handed and barely even looking at Tubbo. It's one of those things that Purpled can kinda just do, Tubbo gwaks for a moment, before collapsing on the couch between Tommy and Purpled.

He throws his legs into Purpled's lap, and Purpled looks at Tubbo, then at Tommy. "What are you... doing?" Purpled asks carefully, his hands frozen and in the air, like he's afraid of being kicked by Tubbo.

Tubbo just looks at him lazily, "You gonna protest?"

“Yes?”

Tubbo groans, and sits up, swinging his legs off of Purpled. Who looks conflicted about what to think about the entire thing. He blinks a few times and then hunches over, looking at the TV like it personally offended him.

Okay... then, each to their own, he supposes.

And the game starts (Tommy chooses Toad, he always has. Tubbo chooses Waluigi and Purpled chooses Peach, while glaring the entire time, it's honestly too funny. Tommy almost loses his fucking mind.)

That's how they spend three hours just playing Mario Kart. Swearing at each other, laughing, and once Purpled shelled him, and Tommy sat there in a corner for twenty minutes, muttering under his breath.

For the first time in... almost forever, he actually hear Purpled laugh. And throw tantrums as he swears at the controllers, it really is quite funny. Purpled swears under his breath, before picking up a pillow and hitting Tubbo in the face repeatedly. He acts like a normal teenager, they all do.

“Fuck!” Tommy yells.

The door opens. Ranboo looks at the three of them. He blinks a few times, confusion clearly evident on his black and white face as he blinks at Tommy and Tubbo, before moving onto Purpled.

Purpled looks tired. “I’m Purpled.”

“Like... the vigilante?” Ranboo asks slowly, he puts his bag next to the pile of shoes. And runs a hand through the mismatched black and white hair. “Oh. Tommy has told me a lot about you.”

“Has he?” Purpled asks, looking at Tommy, a grin on his face. “Is that right? Would you like to hear about the time that Tommy smashed his face against the side of a bu—”

“Nope!” Tommy launches himself across the couch and slams his hand across Purpled’s mouth who laughs into his hand. “They would not.”

Tubbo looks intrigued. “No, I’d love to hear what Tommy did.”

“No, no, nope!” Tommy shakes his head and Purpled laughs a little bit harder. “Okay! Purpled, I am very glad you met Tubbo and Ranboo, but I do not want that to be happening again.”

Tubbo laughs, and he rolls his eyes. “Tommy, you like Purpled the most.”

“Not any more!” Tommy says in a sing-song voice. He removes his hand from Purpled’s mouth and wipes his hand on Purpled’s shirt. “Ew.”

Purpled grins, “Would you like to hear about Tommy slamming his face into a building?”

Tommy groans, covering his face with his hands and groaning. He shakes his head a bit more, and tries to deny what he just did. It probably won’t work, but he’s going to try anyway. He shakes his head.

“So,” Purpled leans back and Tommy brings up his hood and pulls on the drawstrings hoping that he stops existing. Fades into another dimension, that doesn’t look like a valid option at the moment but he can pray. “He was messing about, and said that he could make it across this main road with his powers, over a bunch of cars. Then we did a practice of what would happen if he did fall, he could catch himself.” That bit was a lie, they had not practiced

Tommy catching himself that day. “And he... flung himself across the gap and then just proceeded to fall. He managed to catch himself but sent himself into the side of a building, smashing his face against it.”

Tommy winces, “You have no proof!”

Ranboo nods slowly, “Alright. Tubbo has a new best friend. What are we having for dinner?”

“Do we have anything?” Tommy asks, sitting up.

Ranboo shrugs and goes to the cupboard, he looks around for a bit, before turning around and shaking his head.

Tubbo pulls a face, before reaching for his phone. “How much is in the bank?”

Tommy reaches for his phone, bringing the bank up. He frowns, payday is... not until Tuesday. He glares slightly, like the number on his phone is wrong, before looking at Tubbo and Ranboo. “You guys have any money?”

“Rent money,” Ranboo says, also looking at his phone. “Well... shit.”

Purpled sighs, “I’ll pay.”

“Wait, what?” Tommy says, whirling around to face Purpled and blinking a few times. Eyes wide and almost completely shocked. “You hate spending money.”

“I hate *wasting* money,” he corrects, looking down at his shoes. “There’s a difference. I can pay, it’s not like I’m lacking any money. Or I can transfer the money if you’re gonna be weird about it.”

“No,” Tubbo interjects, “We will not complain about free food.”

“I’m choosing where we eat,” Purpled adds, as an afterthought. He gets no objections and blinks at all of them. “You three really are broke, aren’tcha?”

“Don’t need to rub it in, dude,” Ranboo mutters, “Not all of us are okay with murder.”

“I have never murdered someone,” Purpled scoffs, arms crossed, “Murder is planned. I don’t do hits.”

“Well that’s comforting!” Ranboo adds, and Tubbo snorts. “How many bones have you broken?”

Purpled just looks at him, an eyebrow quirked. “You really wanna know?”

“No!” Ranboo squeaks.

And Purpled actually laughs, he shakes his head, before looking back at everyone. He reaches for his backpack, before swinging it over his shoulder, standing up and grabbing his phone. “Okay. We’re going to a taco van.”

“Why?” Tubbo asks slowly.

“Because I like tacos,” Purpled deadpans, he walks towards the door, before glancing over his shoulder. “You guys coming?”

Tommy launches himself off the couch, nodding and rushing forwards. Ranboo and Tubbo scramble over too, and Tommy snatches the key off the counter. The group file out of the apartment. Stumbling over themselves slightly, and Purpled almost falls down the stairs (Ranboo catches him.)

They start across the footpath, and if Tommy had ever had the slightest of normalcy in his childhood, he imagines this is what it would be like. Tubbo is walking backwards, talking with his hands and Ranboo pulling him away from pedestrians and the occasional bike.

Purpled has his hands firmly in his pockets, he's not smiling, that's for sure. But he doesn't look upset or angry he just looks, like a teenager wearing all black and looking angsty. It's nice actually, it's really, really nice to see Purpled not in an environment where he's beating the shit out of people in a bar.

"So!" Tubbo exclaims, as Ranboo pulls him out of the way of a bike. "Purp—"

"Shh," Purpled hisses, he glances around. "Shut it."

"Oh." Tubbo blinks a few times, "What do I call you?"

"I dunno," Purpled mutters, eyes still darting around. "Not Purpled... which is my vigilante name. You don't go around calling Tommy, Theseus—"

"Shut."

"Exactly!" Purpled exclaims.

"Okay, what's your real name?" Tubbo asks, and Purpled's step falters, he manages to trip and stumble over his feet and Tommy stops him from falling into oncoming traffic. For a moment they all stand there.

The sun is setting, the street lamps are on and cars are whizzing past, clearly it's rush hour. The lights are almost blinding, but welcome.

“Dunno.” Purpled shrugs.

“What?” Ranboo says, confusion laced all throughout his voice.

Purpled takes a deep breath, obviously a tired breath. Like he’s played this conversation out hundreds and hundreds of times. He shoves his hands into his pocket again, and keeps walking. “Dunno, was left on the side of the road wearing Purpled. I don’t exist.”

“Oh.” Ranboo says, “I’m sorry?”

“It’s whatever.” Purpled shrugs, like it doesn’t affect him. But Tommy knows him well enough to know he does, it’s the way his eyebrow twitches and there’s a small crease on his forehead. “Everyone knows someone with that story, it’s just that most people aren’t that person.”

Tubbo nods, in complete understanding. “Yeah...” Tubbo says, “I get you.”

Purpled presses his mouth into a thin line, nodding slightly.

They keep walking in relative silence.

Turning down an alley, Purpled doesn’t react. Tommy doesn’t either, but he can see Tubbo tense and Ranboo puts his head down, eyes on the floor. Sometimes Tommy forgets that Tubbo just doesn’t go outside that much. It’s basically been drilled into every L’Manberg kid, don’t go down alleys. And if you do have some sort of weapon. Keep your head down, don’t respond to anyone who says anything. It’s something that everyone learnt, as simple and complex as that.

Every kid knows the statistics.

Purpled's the only one who walks with any confidence, he puts his shoulders back and walks. He turns around, looking at Tubbo and Ranboo, before looking at Tommy. He laughs, and rolls his eyes. "Guys, it's not one of those alleys."

They keep walking, Ranboo doesn't move his eyes off the ground. Tommy does.

They emerge into a square, a break in all the buildings. It looks like a building was torn down here and the area is now here. Tommy stares though.

It's beautiful, is the only word for it. Lights strung across from the sides of buildings, making a criss-cross of lights that floods the concrete below. It reflects in everyone's wide eyes as they stare. Someone's playing guitar, and there are people bustling around the square, there are several food trucks and stalls, things are sizzling, people are laughing and sitting around tables.

Purpled grins, "Welcome to Logstechire!"

"We live here dickhead," Tubbo says, still slightly in awe and looking around the place, "Why don't I know of it."

"People like to hide the good things about Logstechire," Purpled shrugs, he looks around for a moment, before grinning. "Aye! Kero's van. They're here again."

"Kero?" Tommy asks, eyes following Purpled's eyes. It landed on a purple and silver truck, with '*Kero's Taco's*' on the side. It is a nice truck, people seem to be queued for a bit. Purpled waves a hand, and walks forwards.

Tubbo, Ranboo and Tommy follow after him.

The person in the truck seems to recognise Purpled. Because their face lights up and they gesture the small group over. Purpled cuts in front of the line, so that he's standing to the side of the van, but still in front. He drops his bag next to the wheel of the van.

“Hey Kero,” Purpled deadpans.

They have brown puffy hair, which is in a ponytail that is falling out in strands around their head, they have a pair of goggles on the top of their head. Something Tommy won’t think about too much. They brush some stray hair away from their face, before looking at the gaggle of teenagers assembled outside of their truck. Most startling though, are the bright white static eyes... like their eyes are a TV malfunctioning in their eyes. It’s both very cool, and slightly terrifying.

“Hello!” They say, their eyes drift over to Tubbo, Tommy and Ranboo. Their eyes narrow and they look back at Purpled. “Do you have friends?”

“Have more faith in me,” Purpled mumbles. Kero raises an eyebrow and Purpled shrugs. “The blond one’s Tommy, the hybrid is Ranboo and the short one is Tubbo. Everyone, this is Kero, Kero funds my spaghetti taco addiction.”

“Spaghetti... taco?” Ranboo says, his eyes are wide, and it looks like he’s slowly falling in love with the concept of a spaghetti taco.

“Yeah!” Kero exclaims, gesturing at the sign, which reveals that the spaghetti tacos are on special. And that they’re well renowned. Purpled nods, thoughtfully and smiles a little bit brighter.

Ranboo looks at Purpled. “Can I have one of those?”

“Sure—”

“You’re paying?” Kero asks, promptly ignoring a customer who started complaining. They look at the customer with a withering glare, and the customer seems to melt under it. Because that customer nods and walks off. Kero turns their attention back to the four of them. “Dan —”

“It’s fine,” Purpled waves a hand, “I got paid yesterday.”

“We both know that the tower doesn’t pay enough,” Kero deadpans and Tommy shifts uncomfortably. Okay. No need to rub it in taco-person. “And—” they glance at Tubbo, Ranboo and Tommy.

“They know.”

“Oh.” Kero blinks, “That you haven’t done any work in a while...”

“Kero,” Purpled says, surprisingly earnestly too, “I promise. I am in no risk of running out of money, I’m being offered jobs still, I turned one down yesterday... something about setting up some sort of weapon. Okay?”

Kero nods, but they don’t seem convinced, “On the house.”

“Kero.”

“Nope.” Kero turns around, “Four spaghetti tacos and four sides of fries.” They look at the group of them, before turning around and busying themselves.

Purpled looks at them, and smiles a bit. Tubbo grins back.

Then there’s a crack, like a whip being snapped. And Tommy whirls around he faces towards, he looks around for where the noise came from. He sees nothing, apart from some yelling and what looks like a scuffle in the far corner.

Arms pull him up and backwards, and he hits metal with a crash. Another body crashes into him and Tommy groans. His head is throbbing and his ears are ringing. There’s another crack, like a whip.

Oh. Tommy realises with a dull sense of panic. *That's a gun being shot* . That seems to kick his brain into gear, and he sits up a bit higher, blinking.

His brain does the headcount. Tubbo, Ranboo and Purpled are in the van. And Kero's here too, his brain fills in the blank. Kero dragged them all into the van, it's cramped, he's pressed between Purpled and Tubbo.

Right. Okay.

There's another gunshot and all of them flinch.

Purpled and him look at each other, and they give a short nod. They need to get out of here, and ideally a mask. But not necessarily. Tubbo seems to know what is happening as well, which always helps.

There's more scuffling, a gunshot, a scream and Tommy flinches. Okay. They have to do this sooner rather than later.

"Kero..." Purpled whispers. "Can you keep a secret?"

"Yes." Kero whispers back, they pop their head out of the top of the counter, before dropping to the ground again. "I will keep any secrets if it gets us out alive."

Tommy and Purpled make eye contact again. Tommy goes through his pockets, finding a few small pebbles, he passes those to Purpled with no hesitation.

It's quiet now, and Tommy knows that everyone is sitting on the ground, eyes closed and hoping a hero or someone gets here before someone decides to hurt them. Purpled takes a deep breath, before popping over the top of the counter.

He throws three pebbles and they clatter against the far wall. Tommy hears the confusion, there's a yell and Purpled turns around, opening the door at the back of the food truck. It's not heard over the yelling.

The backpack. They're going to need Purpled's backpack. It almost certainly has Purpled's gear in it, and knowing Purpled, probably backup stuff too. Purpled looks at Tommy, expecting something.

Tommy rolls his eyes, before picturing the bag. Sitting against the wheel of the purple and silver van. He closes his eyes again, waiting for the pull. There's the noise of something rustling, and the bag is in his hand.

Kero looks at Tommy. "Oh. You're—"

And Purpled darts out the door, Tommy joining him. He closes the door to the food truck with a quiet noise, and pauses for a moment. The pair of them kneel down behind the food truck.

With zero hesitation, Purpled passes Tommy a black mask, a pair of goggles and a black hoodie. It's not the best option, but it'll do. It's his powers and his sign language that is more associated with him anyway.

Tommy pulls those things onto his face.

Purpled grabs a purple hoodie, pulling it on, and his mask and goggles combo (which is actually sewn together and won't fall off unlike Tommy's.)

There's another gunshot, and Tommy freezes.

He doesn't think about it, before pushing himself off the ground using his powers. He flies over the top of the food truck, relishing in the feeling, even if he needs to grab onto his hood to keep it from flying off.

He lands. And it hurts his knees because he doesn't do it right.

People sitting on the ground. People in all black, with masks, several guns. Okay. He can do this. He knows Purpled is on his way, and has his back.

Two to his right, three to his left and two blocking the exit. The two at the exit have the biggest guns, and they point straight at him. No hesitation. People are sitting down, hopefully no civilian injuries are in the mix.

For a moment there's a break and he's just looking.

Then he throws himself up, and plants a foot on the wall before soaring. Scrambling, he grabs his hood, and lands behind three of the people.

He ducks and bullets embed themselves into the wall where Tommy just was. Flicking his wrist, red swirls engulf one of the people and Tommy pulls, they stumble to the ground and Tommy jumps back in the air.

Vaguely he's aware of a flash of purple and another scream.

Just his heart is in his throat, pounding in his chest. And a quiet whispering, which doesn't *get shot*. Again and again, which resounds in the back of his head, as he grabs one of the guns pointed at him.

He yanks, and the gun flies up into the air. Catching it with his magic, he tears it in half. Two halves fall either side of him.

One down.

Two to go.

He ducks again, throwing up a shield, it stops a few bullets. Releasing the shield, it hits all three of the people who stumble back. Tommy reaches out, a gun engulfed in red, and it falls apart in the hands of whoever holds it.

One more.

He looks up.

Purpled is fighting, hand-to-hand, always his strong points. What he doesn't see is the gun being pointed at his back.

Tommy opens his mouth to scream.

Kero has darted out of the van, they've landed on their feet. Then they body slam the person who's pointing the gun at Purpled. The gun skitters across the ground and Kero proceeds to pick it up and use the gun to hit the person a few times.

A click of a gun brings him back to his fight. He swears, and throws an arm up. There's a flash of red, one he has very little control of. His opponents blink at him, and Tommy rushes forwards.

Taking a leaf out of Kero's book, he slams into the person with the gun. They drop the gun. (None of these people seem very well trained.) Tommy kicks the gun away, and it skids over to someone, who picks it up. They don't move from on the ground, but that civilian has saved Tommy from a future issue—

He's yanked back, and hits the ground. Pain shoots through his body, and for a moment he can't think about anything.

Rolling out of the way, he avoids a boot stomping where his chest had been, and stumbles back onto his feet. He's going to need to think of something good, he can't take three people in hand to hand, not really.

Think. Think. Think.

Tommy looks up. The lights. He can use those as ropes.

He reaches one hand up towards the light and feels his power latch on, before he yanks downward and the lights fall. Some bulbs smash against the ground, some people scream.

Tommy picks up the light, yanking on it. It snaps in his hand, and Tommy pushes off the wall. He throws out his arms, his powers giving some balance. He lands, and starts wrapping the light string. He darts around the other side, doing it pretty well and pulling tightly.

The group falls to the ground, and Tommy finishes by tying a knot. A knot that Tubbo taught them when they were young, he yanks on the knot, and hopes the rope won't move. He looks up.

Purpled is currently beating the shit out of three people. He picks up a chair, before slamming it across someone's face. That person cries out, and Purpled finishes with a kick. They all to the ground.

With a sigh, Purpled looks up. He looks at Tommy.

"We done here?" Purpled says, his voice is slightly distorted, he actually got a voice modulator. Finally. Tommy feels very proud, like a brother watching his other brother not make a fucking stupid decision for once.

Tommy nods.

He glances at Ranboo and Tubbo, who have peaked their head over the top of the food van. Then he looks at all the people sitting on the ground.

What takes his eye the most, is a vase. A glass vase sitting on the ground, with a bunch of pale pink and white flowers. He looks at them for a longer moment, he recognises them... he thinks.

“Take a photo of the flowers.” Tommy signs at Tubbo, who nods and takes out his phone. He looks around at all the people. Who look terrified then looking at the people dressed in the black who were tied up, or knocked out.

Tommy takes a few steps, before approaching one of the people in all black. Tommy reaches for the mask on their face, and they yell. Tommy draws his hand back, and glances at Purpled.

“Are they hybrids?” Tommy signs to Purpled.

Purpled glances at the figures, before stepping towards his bunch of knocked out people. He moves so that his body is between prying eyes and the general public... all staring with wide eyes. Tommy assumes his moves the masks, before putting them back. Because after a bit Purpled whirls around and nods.

Tommy pulls a face behind his mask.

There's the flap of wings, and Tommy looks up.

It's Philza.

Oh fuck no.

Tommy is not dealing with that. Not today. Not anytime soon, he looks at Purpled, who still has his mask and goggles on, but Tommy can sense the panic.

And then Phil is standing in the middle of the courtyard, like the superhero he is. He looks around, before his gaze settles on Tommy. Tommy's heart jumps, and for a moment he can't think of anything.

They just stare at each other.

Then Phil moves forwards, and Tommy launches himself into the air. He doesn't think twice as he lands on top of a roof, before dragging Purpled up too with his magic. He lands slightly less gracefully and Tommy drags him back onto his seat.

"What did you do?" Purpled yells, and they break out into a run.

"I don't think Philza and I are going to have a great relationship—" Tommy soars over the gap between two buildings, and Purpled lands at the same time as him. They run step in step.

Tommy dares another look over his shoulder.

Shit, Phil's flying.

"What do we do?" Purpled yells, and Tommy is really hoping the wind hides their voices slightly. "Thanks, real fucking helpful."

They jump across another gap, and Purpled stumbles a bit, Tommy drags him back up and they keep running. His heart is in his throat, an annoying thump as the flap of wings gets closer and closer.

They're running out of buildings— and really quickly.

Purpled, doesn't stop running to his credit. Probably a mix of trust that Tommy will get them across this huge gap, and just being an idiot. Tommy isn't great at controlling his power for two separate moving things—

They don't have a lot of time to think about this, considering they need to jump—

For a moment Tommy soars in the air, red sparks surround Purpled and Tommy flicks his wrist.

Purpled flies.

Tommy falls.

He scrambles for a grip, or to get control over his powers instead of just spinning in the air slightly. The wind whips around his hood and mask, and the ground gets closer and closer and he's going to hit it—

Someone grabs him, someone with black wings.

Tommy stares, wide-eyed.

One hand. Phil saved him from dying.

Other hand. FUCK!

His brain short circuits for a moment.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. *What does he do?*

Punch. Get out of bird-man's arms. Get on the ground.

Tommy brings up a fist, clocking Phil in the jaw. Who lets go of him, with a yell and Tommy plummets towards the ground. He throws his hands out in front of him, and launches himself back into the air.

Somehow, by a miracle, he falls towards the building, and a purple clothed arm manages to grab him around the wrist and Tommy's hauled up and over the side of the building. Before Tommy breaks into a run.

"Mate." Phil lands in front of them, and Tommy stumbles back slightly, holding an arm in front of Purpled.

He refuses to drag Purpled into this clusterfuck of identities, mistakes and whatever the fuck his life has devolved into. He is more than willing to fling Purpled off this building to do that, if he gets caught... then he gets caught, what can you do?

Tommy takes a deep breath before moving in front of Purpled.

It's quite easy to see the hatred in Phil's eyes, and it hurts more than it should. Everyone knows that Philza and Spectre (and most of the fucking tower) hate vigilantes. This isn't a new thing.

Purpled makes a noise.

Tommy glares. "*What?*" He signs. His heart is thumping so loud, he hopes that no one can hear it. That would be really fucking awkward. Maybe Purpled, Purpled probably feels about the same right now. "*Please just walk away. I will win this fight.*"

“Will you?” Phil laughs, he tilts his head.

“I’m not losing this fight.” Tommy returns carefully, apparently Phil knows sign language. And that list appears to be growing. If Purpled is freaking out he’s hiding it a lot better than Tommy is.

“Leave us be?” Purpled tries. “We’re not hurting anyone.”

Phil laughs.

Ouch. Okay.

“Oh, aren’t you?” Phil looks at Tommy, “Aren’t you Theseus?”

Ouch. Again.

Tommy doesn’t move, he doesn’t say anything. He really, really, really, doesn’t want to fight Phil. It will make everything worse, but Purpled’s identity is on the line, and Tommy is not giving up his identity without a fight.

“What’s he talking about? Theseus.”

“Later.” Tommy signs. He watches Phil. Everyone knows that his wings are both his biggest strength, and weakness. Tommy wonders if his powers could do something to those wings or not.

He’s not making the first attack.

Wait. Will this be a media nightmare for Tommy to try and figure out? He looks around, he can't see anything, but he has a feeling there's at least one camera pointed at them. He looks at Phil, then at Purpled.

Right.

They can figure this out. Hopefully.

"So, Theseus," Phil says, and his tone is wrong. It's just wrong, it's not the tone he uses on Wilbur or Techno or even on him when he's not a coward hiding behind the mask and goggles. "I'm assuming you've been better than Technoblade has?"

"I wouldn't say better." Tommy signs back and takes a step back. So he's next to Purpled.
"I'm doing pretty shit."

Phil snorts. "Is that right?"

Tommy nods. Because yeah, it fucking is, and he's not going to be convinced that he's not having a good time. Sure, this is his fault, and his own actions led to him having a shit time. But he's feeling pretty shit, if he had to be honest.

So yeah, fucking Philza Minecraft. That is right. He's having a shit time.

He blinks, and Purpled glances at him. Are they just supposed to debate this on a rooftop? Because Tommy is more than willing to do that.

"What are you actually here for?" Purpled says, his tone is even, and Tommy is just so grateful for the voice modulator Purpled has. "Here to intimidate some children? Because you're doing a great job at that."

“I’m not here for you... Purpled, isn’t it? I’m here to ask Theseus about what the fuck happened to my kid.”

And this is awkward, to say the least. He blinks at Phil, trying to think of anything to say. I mean... he could say what happened or... Phil could just fucking ask Techno. If Phil was out here, who was making sure Techno was alright? Wilbur?

Tommy tilts his head at Phil. *“You’re out chasing a vigilante, instead of being there for him?”* He signs quickly, heartbeat quickening at the idea of just... not being nice to Phil, Phil who has only been nice to him.

Phil who is about to fucking throw him off a roof.

Hopefully not. Tommy’s kinda done with being thrown off roofs. And done with his poor ribs being a new punching bag for all the superheroes who have decided that he’s the root of all of their problems.

He isn’t even. Maybe it’s the fucking trash socioeconomic relations and that he’s tired of being treated worse than dirt—

Okay so now he’s mad and scared, last time that happened he fucking broke their shower. (Long story, a very long story actually. He’s not explaining that one.) He glares and takes a deep breath.

Phil blinks at him. “Theseus. Make this easy for us. Come with me.”

“He will not be doing that,” Purpled says, putting a hand on Tommy’s shoulder, and Tommy agrees with that one. “In fact. We’re gonna go home. And you’re going to leave. Leave us alone.”

Phil shakes his head. “No, mate.”

“Okay.” Purpled says easily, and he pulls a gun out of... fucking no where. Tommy’s sure that his jumper might just have a secret gun pocket. Which doesn’t shock him too much, “Philza. Do you know what my power is?”

“On the file it says superhuman accuracy.”

“That is correct.” Purpled says easily, “I don’t think bullets would look too nice in your wings.” Purpled tilts his head, and gives a smile, it’s hard to see under the mask but not impossible. “So... Philza, please let us go.”

Phil just raises an eyebrow. “You’re not actually gonna shoot me—”

There’s the sound of two gunshots, and Purpled is still holding the gun steady. There’s a gash across Phil’s face, it looks like a graze, and red blossoming from his shoulder. Tommy stares partly in horror, partly in amazement.

Damn. That takes some dedication.

“Now we run!” Purpled yells, grabbing Tommy and jumping off the side of the building, Tommy goes to grab onto the building. But instead flicks his wrist, and they go flying across and onto a fire escape.

“What the fuck?” Tommy whispers, taking the stairs of the fire escape, darting down the stairs and landing on the concrete. “Do you have a death wish?”

“They won’t do shit,” Purpled mutters.

There’s a woosh of wings which seems to disagree and Tommy is being kicked across the way, he slams against the wall and his ribs creak in disagreement. He groans, before looking up.

Purpled has the gun held, very, very steadily, it's pointed at Phil's face.

Tommy, doesn't know what to do. Purpled might shoot. He might not. He can't let Phil get hurt, but he can.

Slowly Tommy manages to get back onto his feet, if people could stop kicking him into walls then maybe he'd live until eighteen. Which would be much appreciated, then he could drink... or... maybe just say he made it this far.

He groans.

"Look," Phil says, "I don't want to hurt you. I don't care about what you do, you've done nothing—"

"I just shot you twice—"

"Purpled." Phil says, it's firm and the tone a fucking father uses. "I've heard about you, and I think you're good news."

"I just shot you twice." Purpled states again, voice frighteningly even. "And I'll do it again. In the thigh, so you stop running after us. Stop running after us, go home and take care of your kid. Will getting revenge on Theseus do anything?"

Phil falters, he actually falters, he opens his mouth and closes it again. Before his eyes flicker over to Tommy.

Violence is a cycle. Everyone knows that. You'd hope a superhero was strong enough to realise that.

“What will it do?” Purpled says, he takes a step back. He puts a hand behind his back. “ *R-A-N-B-O-O*.” He signs, one handed, quite impressive actually.

Slightly awkward, Tommy doesn’t fucking have a panic button, or his phone. Since his actual costume is... y’know at home. There’s almost no way that he can get Ranboo here, there’s almost no way that he can alert them.

He tries to think.

Flares. He can do those, send a burst of sparks into the air. Tommy used to use those when they were all younger and less powerful. All he needs to do is get back up onto the roof, they’re not too far, they’d see it—

Tommy thinks.

He’ll need to launch himself into the air, something that is Phil’s domain. He’s probably going to get snatched, and then he needs to rely on Ranboo getting him.

He takes a deep breath—

He trusts Ranboo and Tubbo to know this sign.

Then he launches himself upwards, and soars through the air. He sets off a group of sparks which crackle in the air, it’s bright. Tommy flinches at the brightness of it all. He feels himself falling back towards the ground.

There’s the woosh of wings, and Tommy finds himself being carried around the middle by Phil again. He twists and tries to get himself free, but apparently Phil is pretty fucking strong.

Limbs flail, but apparently that's not good enough. He twists and turns, trying to get free, they're not too far from the building. If Tommy fell from here he'd be fine, the probably is he just can't get free.

Tommy manages to twist so he's facing Phil, he sends a fist flying at Phil, and in return Tommy gets punched in the nose. His eyes water... a lot, he manages to hit Phil in the face again.

Apparently this hurts, because Tommy's dropped and he catches himself at the last minute with magic. He looks up.

Zwoop .

Someone grabs his arm.

Zwoop.

He's on the floor of his apartment, just like that. Laying there, with Tubbo and Purpled looking down at him. Ranboo is standing to the side, swaying dangerously and trying to get control of his breathing.

Tubbo turns to Ranboo, concern lacing his expression.

Purpled kneels down next to Tommy, helping him sit up. "Come on idiot, we gotta check your injuries."

Tommy manages to peel off the mask and goggles, eyes still watering. He blinks at Purpled, who is slightly blurry due to tears.

Purpled winces, and that's never good. "Your nose looks very broken."

“Reset it.” Tommy mutters, “Just reset it.”

Purpled nods, and does what they’ve done plenty of times. There’s a crunch and Tommy’s vision swims, tears blur his vision and Tommy winces. Purpled moves back a bit, nodding at his handiwork.

Tommy blinks.

He gets up off the floor, and looks at Ranboo who has promptly fallen asleep on the couch. Tubbo runs a hand down his face, he looks impossibly tired. He looks at Tommy, then at Purpled.

“We got your stuff,” Tubbo says, looking between Purpled and Tommy. “It’s too late to go home, Purpled you stay here.”

Purpled looks shocked at this. He blinks a few times, and he opens his mouth. “Are you sure?”

“Yeah.” Tubbo says, “Thanks for looking after him.”

“Oh— no problem, anyone would’ve done the same—”

“No, no they wouldn’t,” Tubbo looks at Tommy with a smile on his face. “You two, go to sleep.”

Tommy just smiles, rolling his eyes slightly. But generally looking fond, he looks at Purpled. “We got another bed, pretty sure Tubbo’s sleeping on the couch with Ranboo.”

Purpled blinks. “I can sleep on the floor—”

"That's a load of rubbish," Tommy mutters. "Tubbo will actually knock you out."

And Purpled pauses, just standing in the doorway as Tommy looks for some comfortable clothes to sleep in. Going through the rack of clothes (dressers are expensive and less practical.)

Eventually Tommy finds clothes that suit well enough and he turns around.

Purpled is smiling, just a soft smile. He looks at Tommy. "Thank you."

And Tommy shrugs. "The apartment is loud."

"That's what I need."

"Well, welcome to the family." Tommy says. Purpled snorts.

But they both know that Tommy means it.



Chapter End Notes

Summary:

Purpled rocks up at the house! Woo Purpled shenanigans. They play Mario Kart, and just muck around like kids. Ranboo comes home, and Purpled calls them broke several times before deciding he'll pay for dinner, but he chooses where they go.

They agree and go to this food corner, where they meet Kero (one of Purpled's friends). They're about to get food when they hear gunshots.

Tommy and Purpled go all superhero. There are flowers left behind. Philza shows up. They book it, featuring Tommy almost plummeting to his death multiple times. He gets in a fight, Purpled shoots Phil twice, and Tommy gets off a distress signal to Ranboo and Tubbo.

Ranboo rocks up and teleports them out. And Tubbo makes Purpled sleep at the apartment.

Hey all, this might be the last update for twoish weeks, as I am busy doing things and A-Author simply isn't a mad lad who can write this many words in basically three days. (Which is fair, I need help.)

Hope you enjoyed this chapter. And if you didn't... IT'S PURPLED, HOW CAN YOU NOT?

Also, side note. I see all the comments and notes on bookmarks, and I'm not saying I have some questions for some people. But I have some questions for some people. Another side note, I do see all the comments! Sometimes I don't reply to them all because... I get overwhelmed, but I do see them all!

In Which Tommy's Emotional Support Is The Colour Purple

Chapter Notes

Welcome! I have returned, here, have some food.

Warnings: minor injuries, acrophobia (fear of heights), lots of crying

Let me know if I've missed anything! As always there is a summary at the end.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“What happened to you?” Phil asks too early in the morning.

Tommy clutches his coffee and looks at Phil. Expression flat. He blinks at him a few times, hoping he can get the pure exhaustion in his features, and some of that rage sent at Phil. So he turns around and sips his coffee.

Because fuck that.

He can see his reflection in the window and it isn't very pretty. His nose has a spectacular bruise that extends up to his eye. It's a dark blue, and looks like some asshole punched him in the face.

Oh. Wait. They fucking did.

“Asshole punched me,” Tommy says easily, spinning back around and glaring. “Fucking broke my nose.”

“Henry—”

“I can confirm,” Henry speaks through the speakers, and Tommy scrunches up his nose.
“Also he has a fractured rib.”

“What?” Tommy asks, he tries to think of when that might have happened. And comes up very short. When did he get knocked in the ribs? Was that from falling down the stairs two weeks ago. “Really?”

“Yes, Thomas,” Henry says, voice as sarcastic as AI can be. “Your rib is fractured.”

“Nice.”

Wilbur runs through the door, tripping over his own feet and landing at Tommy’s feet. He looks up at Tommy. “How the fuck? Do we need to wrap you in fuckin’ bubblewrap... what happened to your nose.”

“Some asshole punched me,” Tommy sighs, before looking up at the roof, like he’s looking up at Henry. “Do I really have a fractured rib?”

“Yes.”

“When did that happen?”

Henry stays quiet, which is *really, really*, helpful. Thank you Henry for your addition to this conversation. Really narrowing it down.

Phil looks concerned.

Fucking good, asshole punched him.

Wilbur looks at Phil, “What’s wrong with you?”

“Run in with some vigilantes last night.”

“Gee,” Tommy mutters, rolling his eyes. “Is this another fucking Wilbur situation. If I go onto Twitter and see that you’re trending, I am going to fucking beat you up. I am so tired of fucking vigilantes.”

“Hey—” Wilbur says, but it’s weak, clearly he wants Tommy to rant about how much he hates vigilantes. “They do... some good work.”

“Not for me!” Tommy yells, throwing his arms up in the air. “They just fucking... make my job so much more difficult,” he spins around looking at Wilbur and Phil. “Stop engaging with them! If you hate them so much, just stop associating yourself with them. We get it! You hate them, can you just... pretend not to. Please? My job is already so fucking difficult with Techno joking about taking down the government and Wilbur in general. I expect better from you Phil!”

He pauses.

He’s pretty sure the spirit of Tubbo just took over him.

"I don't know what that was, I'm so sorry." Tommy starts, ready to try to not get fired if he needs to.

Phil and Wilbur look at him, both apparently a bit shocked.

There’s a slow clap behind him, and Tommy turns around to see Techno. He looks a bit tired, his hair is a mess, but he looks at Tommy. A smile almost plays on his face, and Techno leans against the wall.

“Go off.”

“Fuck off.”

“Phil,” Techno says, not breaking eye contact with Tommy. Eye contact that makes Tommy feel extremely judged and like Techno has him figured out only in a moment. It’s... almost impressive, if he wasn’t so scared.

Phil looks at Techno, “You’re not supposed to be here.”

“But I am.” Techno adds, “Can I... talk to you, for a moment?”

“Yeah.” Phil says, straightening up and following Techno who has walked back into the elevator, and Phil runs a few steps to keep up with him.

Tommy watches them both leave, before looking at Wilbur. “Huh?”

“Techno... went to the hospital this weekend,” Wilbur explains, apparently very careful with his words. “He’s waiting on some blood work, he’s a bit stressed about it.”

“Oh.”

“It’s probably late power development,” Wilbur explains, “Makes sense for him. But, he’s a bit worried.”

“Oh. Is he... alright?”

“Dunno,” Wilbur shrugs, “Maybe, maybe not. I think he’s better than he was. Niki didn’t find him in great shape.”

“Niki?”

“The co-parent of Floof,” Wilbur explains easily, “She owns a bakery, she’s very nice. I haven’t had a lot to do with her, but she’s one of Techno’s only friends.”

Tommy nods, before looking away from the elevator.

He grabs his phone and opens Twitter. Everything seems okay for now, and now he wants to trend something incredibly dumb. Something that will be so fucking stupid, and for what? Fun? Yeah, he’s going trend something dumb.

Being the sneakiest mother fucker in the universe, he switches to his Theseus account. Eyeing Wilbur warily, but he hops over the counter and opens the fridge. Which he goes looking through.

@theseusiguess: can we trend “wilbur /neg” to give his intern a heart attack?

He switches back, because he’s not quite that stupid and sighs. Wilbur grabs something out of the fridge, a container of some food. It looks like some sort of stir fry, and Tommy looks at him.

“You better get cutlery.”

“Or?” Wilbur challenges, he leaps up onto the counter where he stands. Okay... people prepare food there. Most of the people in the offices prepare food here, in fact it’s one of the best kitchens that staff can access.

Lots of people prepare food here.

Tommy glares up at him. “People make food here.”

“Your point?” Wilbur says but moves so he’s just sitting on the counter. He opens the lid and looks at Tommy.

This bastard isn’t going to eat stir-fry with his fucking hands. Is he?

Wilbur grins.

He eats the fucking stir-fry with his hands.

Tommy stares in horror.

“What is wrong with you?” Tommy whispers, and Wilbur shrugs one of his shoulders. Apparently a lot is wrong with him, and Tommy thinks he needs therapy. “I think you need therapy.”

“Probably.” Wilbur says, wiping his hands on his pants. The pants that probably cost more than Tommy’s rent. “Phil’s been pestering me about therapy since I was like... ten.”

“Huh?”

“Memory issues,” Wilbur says, like he’s listing off a shopping list. “Can’t remember anything from before I was... like ten? And then... later stuff.” His eyes darkened just a little bit for a moment.

He shakes his head. “Hey Henry, tell us a joke.”

There’s a beat of silence. “You.”

It's delivered so deadpanned, and so perfectly that Tommy laughs so hard he almost falls off the chair. He grabs onto the counter and wheezes for a moment longer.

Wilbur chuckles as well. "Henry. I thought we were friends?"

"You thought wrong." Henry deadpans. "Friendship ended with Wilbur. Tommy is my new best friend."

"You know memes!" Tommy yells, looking up at the roof. "Henry... you know memes and didn't tell me."

"Yes." Henry says, "I know memes."

"Henry, I will die for you."

"Then perish."

Tommy snorts again. He looks up at the roof. "Henry. You are so cool."

"Thank you, Thomas," Henry says "I think you are acceptable."

"Acceptable?" Tommy squeaks. "Dude."

Wilbur laughs

And... there is something nice about that. About being actually happy for once, even if it isn't going to last forever. It's... nice to be able to laugh with Henry and Wilbur, even as the threat of outside just appears to loom.

It's nice.

Wilbur returns to his work, and Tommy eventually settles into his office. He sits there, holding a bag of peas to his nose that he found. It helps with some of the pain, what would really help with the pain more is if Philza Minecraft wasn't a bitch—

No.

Philza Minecraft is not a bitch.

He is the only man ever.

He sighs, and scrolls through Twitter, 'wilbur /neg' is already trending. But he's going to give it a bit longer before he starts trying to throw down with Wilbur. And yell at him for something that really isn't his fault, (revenge).

The door opens and Purpled stands there, with the sass of someone who has just been dragged by Tubbo. Which Tommy doubts for several reasons. Purpled groans and launches himself into the rickety chair.

"Guess what!" Purpled exclaims to the roof. "Guess, fuckin' guess."

"I keep forgetting you work here." Tommy groans. "Why are you even here?"

"Specify?"

"At the tower?"

“Oh. Trying to find something out, don’t worry about it—” Purpled waves his hand, and suddenly Tommy is very worried about it. Instead he nods slowly and tries to not be so worried about Purpled being weird. “Okay, so I brought lunch from Kero’s today. And I left it in the fridge... guess what.”

Tommy gasps. “No fucking way.”

“Yes!” Purpled explains, throwing his hands up in the air. “Someone fucking took my tacos, do you know what an upsetting day this is for me? I deserve a taco, I can not deal with Stacy stealing my lunch.”

“It was Stacy?”

“It had to be!” Purpled yells before settling down slightly. “Then she took my stuff from the printer. I need my forms, I need to get paid *Stacy*. ”

“Well...” Tommy says, trying to get his computer to work. “You’re not exactly broke.”

Purpled gives him a look.

“What are you even saving for?”

Purpled shifts in his seat slightly, and he looks down, apparently uncomfortable with that conversation. He looks at Tommy, before his gaze flickers back down to his feet, shaking his head slightly.

Tommy knows to drop the conversation, so he does that. Instead he looks at his laptop and hits the side of it. It’s not frozen anymore, so they have that going for them. Always useful, he’s decided.

“There’s a meeting, like end of the week,” Purpled sighs, “Quackity is talking about it. Apparently sometimes they just eat food? It’s an excuse to just hang out.”

“Bets on Theseus coming up?” Tommy says, he sounds a bit tired, and yeah, he is.

“Guaranteed.” Purpled stands up and cracks his fingers with a pop that makes Tommy glare at him.

Purpled flips him off.

Tommy is going to stab him. He is going to straight up stab a bitch. Sure, Purpled is stronger and better with knives and probably knows three ways to kill him at any moment. And sure, Purpled is still better at hand-to-hand, and the only way Tommy can beat him is using his powers but...

A stabbing will happen today.

“See ya,” Purpled gives a nod. “I’ll be at yours after work.”

“You will?”

“Tubbo invited me over to play Mario Kart.”

“Sure.” Tommy looks back at his computer. He doesn’t mind editing, but the higher ups said he had to edit this video for the Dream Team, and he’s fine with editing. But he’s hating this out of spite.

It’s the driest fucking video ever, and even Tommy is going to struggle to make this funny. But he thinks he’s doing a pretty good job of it. He can always do worse, he was told to make it funny.

He's discovering that wii music while there's a sparring montage is the funniest thing in the fucking world. He snickers as he edits that bit. It's just... so good to see people get beat up with the cheery wii music in the background.

If this gets copy-right claimed. That is not his problem, not even slightly.

Tommy sighs.

He loses himself in the editing for a moment. It's nice, no thoughts, head empty. He doesn't do a lot, instead he sits there and edits.

Again, it's peaceful.

Then Wilbur shows up, because apparently he is always bored and can not entertain himself despite being a grown adult. Wilbur looks at Tommy.

"Lunch break."

"Huh?"

Wilbur puts a bag on the desk, and Tommy looks at it, before looking up at Wilbur expecting an answer but he gets absolutely nothing in response.

"What?"

"It's sushi, I didn't know what you liked so I got a bunch of food." Wilbur sits on the rickety fold out chair, and Tommy wonders when his office has become the prime hanging out spot. Rather than... y'know, the actual lounges.

Wilbur reaches into the bag, and pulls out several containers of sushi, which he arranges on Tommy's desk. Tommy looks at them all, then at Wilbur. He reaches for his wallet. "How much do I owe you?"

"Nothing," Wilbur says, expression flat, "Seriously, I'm not making you pay me back for lunch, I'm a millionaire. What sorta asshole would that make me?"

Tommy huffs, before looking down at it.

"Wait, aren't you vegetarian?" Wilbur asks, "We fed you chicken!"

"Not really vegetarian," Tommy mumbles looking over the sushi. "I just can't eat a lot or I get kinda sick. Also I can eat chicken. Just can't eat a lot of pork or beef." Tommy looks over all the options, before deciding that he wants the chicken teriyaki. He picks up that container and puts it beside him.

"What are you doing?" Wilbur asks, opening his own container.

"Editing a Dream Team thing," Tommy answers absent-mindedly, "Said I had to make it funny," he spins his laptop around and shows Wilbur the sparring montage with the wii music. Wilbur snorts, and he thinks that's good enough. He spins it back around so that it's facing him. "Uh, that charity event is soonish. And the hero meeting is..." he pauses and opens the calendar, "Thursday."

Wilbur nods, and shoves an entire sushi roll into his mouth. Something very charming, and Tommy screws up his nose. Gross.

Wilbur sighs, "Tommy, I am bored."

"I can tell."

"Tommy, I'm bored."

“Go kick a vigilante off a roof—” Tommy mutters, before looking up at Wil, mouth slightly open. “Okay I am very sorry, I have no clue where that came from.”

Wilbur stands up.

“Wil, please, I’m sorry!”

“Don’t talk to me, gremlin,” Wilbur says, but Tommy can hear the smile in his voice. “After all I’ve done for you? You do this? Betrayal, betrayal, is this the last thing I’ll ever see—”

“Are you quoting Hamilton?”

“Tommy, my first friend. My enemy, maybe the last face I’ll ever see—”

“I am going to kill you.”

“If I throw away my shot—”

Tommy throws one of the empty sushi containers at Wilbur. “Fuck off, Wilbur. Some of us actually need to get paid.” He threw another sushi container at Wilbur who seemed mildly offended.

Wilbur pouts.

Tommy throws a scrunched paper bag at Wilbur. It hits him in the nose and bounces onto the floor.

Wilbur looks at Tommy like he's just ended his entire bloodline. He looks down at Tommy before jumping forwards.

Tommy shrieks, throwing his arms up in the air as Wilbur just picks him up off his seat, and slings him over his shoulder like it's the easiest thing in the entire world. Tommy yells and tries to get himself free.

He shrieks with laughter and Wilbur starts laughing too.

"Let me go!" Tommy yells between laughs, "Wilbur! Wilbur, let me go!"

"I simply will not," Wilbur says. Apparently he is strong enough to carry Tommy, which makes sense considering that he's a superhero and therefore has to be kind of strong. "I will quote Hamilton for the rest of time—"

Tommy fights for a bit longer.

Until he accepts his fate and chills there.

Getting carried around the tower, as Wilbur starts reciting the entire Hamilton soundtrack word for word. It's actually impressive. Tommy chills there, because he doesn't have a lot else to do.

Eventually they walk past Quackity.

"Hello." Wilbur says.

"Um. Hi. Is that a body?"

Tommy looks up. “Nope, just me. Wilbur is saying the entire Hamilton soundtrack, and currently trying to belt Satisfied. Which is awkward. Because Wilbur can’t belt.”

“Can too.”

“You really, really can’t.” Tommy sighs and looks at Quackity, a pleading expression in his eyes.

Quackity looks at Wilbur. “Let the child go.”

“Nineteen. Not a child.” Tommy mutters.

“Fine.” Wilbur mutters, and walks over to a couch.

Before dropping Tommy.

Now... Tommy doesn’t have an issue with heights, he’s never been scared of heights. Or falling. He can save himself every time, he’s gotten good at it. He used to throw himself off high things just to learn how to catch himself.

He’s not scared of heights.

But he’s scared of falling.

Hitting the couch, Tommy freezes up.

He fell for like... less than a second. And his blood feels ice-cold. He can almost feel the wind whipping around him from last night, he can almost feel all the times he fell at the hands of another and couldn’t catch himself.

Holy shit.

Tommy sits up, hands clenched into fists.

“Thomas.” Henry says, and that snaps him right out of his panic. “You appear to be—”

“Shut it.” Tommy says, teeth gritted.

Quackity and Wilbur are talking, no one’s really paying a lot of attention to him. Good. They don’t need to know that he’s freaking out about being dropped. He’s fine, really.

His heart is thumping in his chest and all he can think about is falling.

Being dropped.

Falling.

Fuck.

“I’m just saying,” Quackity says, “He’s afraid of sparring with me.”

He shakes his head. He isn’t afraid of falling, he used to do it on command. He isn’t afraid of falling he can’t be—

And Tommy looks out the window to see the top of

They're so high up.

If he fell from here—

“He really isn't.”

Tommy stands up, everything feeling slightly dizzy. He blinks a few times, before clenching his fists. His breathing is shaky, he knows that, he knows that he's going to start freaking out.

“Thomas...” Henry says.

Tommy takes a deep breath.

He looks out the window. How tough is the glass? Could someone just shove him and then he'd go tumbling to his death? Would that be the way he died, if Wilbur found out he was Theseus would he shove him?

“Is the glass bulletproof?” Tommy blurts out, before he can stop himself.

“Huh?” Quackity says. Both Wilbur and Quackity are looking at him.

“Is...” Tommy takes a deep breath, firmly trying to avoid looking out the window. “Is it bulletproof?”

“Yeah?” Wilbur says slowly. “Can't have anyone falling out the window. This stuff is power proof, it's very difficult to break. Quackity, kick the glass to prove my point.”

“What? No way! I'm not insane.”

Wilbur sighs and walks over to the window.

Tommy wants to scream at him to get back. But he bites that fear down and instead brings his fist to his mouth and bites on one of his fingers. He watches Wilbur shake out his hands.

Before kicking the window.

Nothing smashes, and Wilbur stumbles back slightly and looks at Tommy. “See, it’s me proof.”

“You’re also not that strong.” Quackity adds.

“It’s Philza proof,” Wilbur corrects, he looks at Tommy, something akin to worry in his eyes. “Well. Basically the glass will take your kinetic energy and force it back on you.”

Tommy nods, but his eyes drift out to the window anyway.

They’re so high up— and Tommy wouldn’t be able to save himself if he fell—

He ignored the panic that seemed to suffocate him. He really, really needed to be closer to the ground. He took a deep breath and took a couple steps towards the stairs. He didn’t trust himself in the elevator.

Looking at Quackity and Wilbur, he plasters a smile onto his face. “I need to talk to Kristin for a moment, see you when I see you.”

Wilbur nods, before continuing his conversation with Quackity. Tommy almost sprints towards the door that is the stairwell. The stairwell that goes up and down the entire height of the tower.

He's on the 50th floor. He has a while to walk.

So he starts walking, anything to get him up from out of the air and hopefully on the ground. He's so tired of feeling this scared all the time, being up high. It's never bothered him before, why is it all of a sudden worrying him—

Because Phil and Wilbur are here, and it's been proven that they're not exactly afraid to drop him from heights.

Oh God. Phil and Wilbur hate him—

They actually, hate him.

Tommy pauses mid-step and grabs onto the railing like it's going to save him.

They *hate* him.

It's obvious. They hate vigilantes, they've made that clear, they keep attacking him and everything that they're doing appears to be out of spite. Tommy is a vigilante. Tommy is... someone that they hate.

Like specifically, they specifically hate *him*. Theseus, it's targeted at him.

Tommy sinks down, so he's sitting on the stairs.

He doesn't cry, he just stares out across the stairs. The stairwell is cramped, and there's a reason that no one takes the stairs. The stairs are ridiculously long and the elevator is just so much nicer.

But... Phil and Wilbur hate him.

Techno probably does too.

His life feels like it's falling apart, just slightly. Everything's fine.

This is great.

Nothing is going wrong.

And then he bursts out into tears.

He slaps a hand over his mouth and shakes his head, trying to be quiet. He does not need the entire tower to know that he's having a breakdown on the stairwell, that's simply just something he doesn't need on this fine day.

Look, he's already pretty ashamed that *this* is where he finally broke down. He doesn't need other people to know that. He's so fine with not having to deal with that, he is not explaining to anyone.

Instead he's just going to sob in a stairwell.

He shifts so he's sitting against the wall. Hand over his mouth and tears rolling down his cheeks as he focuses on trying to breathe. Breathing is difficult, but not impossible. On one hand his hand pressed over his mouth isn't helping, but on the other hand he is not risking explaining himself.

"Thomas." Henry says, and of course he's in the stairwell. Tommy can't escape him. Tommy looks up at the roof, because that's where he associates Henry with living now. "Thomas. You

need to breathe.”

Okay, fuck off Henry.

“Thomas.” Henry says slightly sterner.

“Don’t you have anything better to do?” Tommy chokes out, and grips onto the stair next to him. Tears still roll down his face, and he pauses every now and again to try and breathe well enough.

This isn’t a panic attack. Yet.

“Thomas, you’re worrying me.”

“You’re an AI,” Tommy says, words almost cut off by a sob. “You can’t feel worried, you can’t be worried, you’re not worried.” He shakes his head to himself and tries with all his might to stop his crying.

But they all hate him—

Oh great, he’s sobbing.

He covers his mouth with his arm. Drawing up his knees to rest his arm on them as he tries to stop himself from crying so hard. He isn’t a child anymore, he can’t just cry when things go terribly wrong.

Well he can.

But not while he’s being paid, he’s not being paid to cry—

“Thomas.” Henry says again, and it sounds softer. How is it softer? Henry is an *AI* who doesn't feel emotions, and Tommy's just personifying him because everything is falling around him— “Thomas. You are really worrying me.”

“Fuck off,” Tommy mutters into his arm, his eyes are blurry from all the tears that he can't blink away. He tries to wipe them away with his hands to very little avail. “Don't most people have breakdowns in stairwells?”

“Technoblade did once,” Henry says, “And that was at a very dark time in his life— I am very worried about your mental state.”

Tommy laughs, it's almost a sob but not quite. “Really! Why's that?” He yells, and it's slightly too loud so he pressed his hand over his mouth like that will take away him yelling a moment ago.

“Thomas,” Henry says, “I will need to alert someone.”

“Don't.” Tommy wipes his eyes and takes a deep breath. It's shaky at best, he sits there for a moment longer.

He's not sobbing anymore, but there are still tears rolling down his face. He just looks at the stairwell, there are some stains and scratches on the stairs. There's also a burn mark and Tommy imagines that a lot of sparring goes on in here off the books.

Probably... other things that Tommy didn't want to think about a lot.

“Henry...” Tommy asks, “Has anyone sparred here?”

“Yup.” Henry's voice echoed through the stairwell, “When lots of the current heroes were younger, Techno and Wilbur often fought here. If you look to your left, you will see where

Techno once threw Wilbur into the wall.”

Tommy looks to his left, and there’s a dent in the drywall. He snorts.

“Who won?”

“Wilbur.” Henry says, “Somehow, he used his powers to make Techno sit down and Wilbur punched him in the face.”

“Oh.” Tommy says, ever-so smartly. Sometimes he forgets what exactly Wilbur can do with his powers. Part of him wonders why he doesn’t use those powers as often.

Also Wilbur appears to be very overpowered. He can do a lot with his powers and hasn’t appeared to do a lot with them.

Tommy takes a deep breath, he’s not crying anymore. He appears to have calmed himself down.

“Hey Henry, thanks.”

“No problem, Thomas.” Henry says and appears to mean it, something that also makes him emotional. Henry is a robot, an AI, but… he’s very kind, and Tommy would probably die for him.

Henry hums thoughtfully and Tommy sighs, he runs a hand down his face trying to get rid of the puffiness.

“I think I’m good now.” He says to no one in particular, he’s not even sure why he’s giving a live commentary, he’s fine. He’s talking to Henry, voicing his thoughts makes him feel better. “Better.”

And Tommy goes to stand up—

And then he starts sobbing.

He doesn't even know why he starts sobbing, he's fine (really), but he starts sobbing so loudly that it hurts his throat. He buries his face in his arm, hoping to suppress the sobs that are shaking his shoulders.

He needs to shut up, he needs to shut the fuck up—

But he can't, his shoulders shake and he can't shut the fuck up. This isn't panic crying, he knows that, he can breathe fine around his sobs, his chest isn't tight, he's just crying. He's just... sobbing.

Tommy wills himself to shut up. Shoving the sleeve of his hoodie into his mouth to try and suppress his sobs. It's not working. Nothing is working. Tommy want to knock himself out or something— anything to stop himself from crying.

Can he just stop crying?

He doesn't even know why he's crying at this point.

Tears drip against the steps, and Tommy's tears fall quicker than he can wipe them away. Vaguely he's aware of Henry speaking into his ears, but he can't hear over his sobbing. It's just all... so much.

There's footsteps, and apparently that is the thing to shut him up because he looks up.

Phil's standing at one of the doors littered every storey, the way that people got up and down. Tommy stares at him, wide-eyed.

He knows that he probably looks like a mess, because in complete truth he is a bit of a mess. When he cries, his skin gets all bright red, and he's cried so much that he probably looks sunburnt. Combined with just the sheer amount of tears, the snot and the snot now on his hoodie sleeve.

Tommy looks at Phil. "Ayup." He manages.

"Tommy?" Phil says, he glances around, "What... are you doing?"

"Having a mental breakdown in the stairwell." Tommy replies his voice is slightly creaky and he takes a deep breath trying to calm himself down. "What else might I be doing?"

"I—" Phil looks at him, looking like he's trying to figure out what exactly is going on behind Tommy's eyes. "What's wrong?"

And Tommy really can't control his emotions today. He starts crying again. Doubling over slightly.

Phil starts to walk up some of the stairs, and Tommy takes a step back. He takes a deep breath and almost stumbles down the stairs.

"Hey, hey, Tommy, you can talk to us—" Phil says, and it's gentle and Tommy hates it. He shoves Phil away, not too roughly, but enough to get him back.

Tommy shakes his head, and takes another step back and shakes his head a bit harder. He just refuses to deal with Phil, or Wilbur or even Techno today. He's too tired for this. He shakes his head again.

"Tommy." Phil's voice is calming, the concern he feels evident with every word he speaks "Tommy, mate, can you tell me what happened?"

Tommy shakes his head frantically, digging the palms of his hands on his eyes to try and stop the tears, everything seemed to put an even heavier weight on his shoulders "No!" He gasps if only not to sob. "I can't— I—" he rubs his eyes, the force he's putting in his hands hurting him now, but that's good, that's a distraction "Fuck—"

Phil carefully, very carefully, pulls his hands away from his eyes, and he has to blink away the blind spots to be able to see again. The action proves to be in vain as the tears start flowing then, blurring his vision and he turns his head down so Phil doesn't look at him.

"Tommy, it's okay." Phil says, his voice is level and Tommy hates it. "Tommy... what happened mate?"

Tommy takes a step back, "Don't touch me!" He looks at Phil, and his hand darts up to his bruised nose. "Don't touch me, okay? Don't touch me."

Phil nods, and takes a step back. "I won't." He takes another step back, both hands in the air. "Okay? What happened Tommy?"

"I can't tell you!" Tommy yells, tears streaming down his face. "I can't tell you, okay? I—" a sob interrupts him and he shakes his head, trying to shake away the tears. It doesn't work. "I can't tell anyone and—" he reaches up to his hair and pulls. "That's the fucking problem!"

Phil takes a deep breath, apparently trying to steady himself. "Tommy, if you can't tell us that's okay. But I'm worried about you, okay bud—"

Tommy sobs.

"And... I don't know what I can do to help."

Tommy can list several things. Stop chasing after Theseus, stop hating Theseus, calm down because vigilantes are alright. Make sure that Techno's alright after everything he's done. Arrest him for being a vigilante? (That would stop everything.)

Instead he shakes his head. "I'm so stressed, Phil!" Tommy yells, and he's not sure why he's saying it. "I'm so stressed, everything is too much and I don't know what to do—" he cuts himself off with a sob.

"Hey, hey, hey," Phil says and he hates how warm and caring it is. "We'll figure it out."

But they wouldn't. If Phil knew he was Theseus, then he would be looking at him with disgust or hatred. And Tommy wants to start screaming at Phil, he really does. Because Phil is so kind and disgustingly nice and he just wants to...

Sob?

Because that kindness is conditional. It's conditional on the one thing that Tommy is. Phil is kind, he's so kind. Unless you're a vigilante, and then he's not kind. And he's *Theseus*, one who has done actual damage to people that he cares about.

He just shakes his head and covers his mouth. Before sitting on one of the steps and crying a little harder.

Phil steps forwards and Tommy shrinks back. Something that stops Phil in his footsteps pretty easily.

There's footsteps. Ones that Tommy recognises very well.

"Move it you glorified chicken nugget!"

Tommy looks up through vision blurred by tears to see Purpled. His shining light, holding a paper bag, and running. He basically kicks Phil to the side, and is sitting in front of Tommy in a moment. Phil looks... Tommy doesn't care.

Purpled looks at him with thinly veiled concern. It's some of the most emotional he's ever seen Purpled show openly. "Toms. What happened?" And it's filled with care, care for every part of him. Theseus, Tommy, the kid that begged Purpled not to break his wrist when they first met because Tommy didn't have insurance—

He bursts out into tears. Again.

And Purpled, Purpled gives him the most caring look that Tommy has ever seen and hugs him. Hugs him. Hugs him so tight that breathing almost hurts, and Tommy is so grateful for the contact.

Purpled isn't a hugger, but Tommy is.

So Tommy cries into his friend's shoulder.

"It'll be okay," Purpled says quietly, "You'll be okay."

And Tommy cries a bit harder.

Long story, short.

He gets to go home after his breakdown.

Woo! Win for him, he goes home.

Purpled doesn't get to go with him.

But he simply goes home.

He gets home, fully expecting the apartment to be empty. And he's going to have a nap too. Tubbo is at school and Ranboo should be doing classes. He swings open the apartment door, ready to flop on the couch.

Ranboo is on the couch, reading a book. Laying down with his legs over the side of the couch. He looks at Tommy and Tommy looks back at him.

"Tommy? What's up?"

"Had a breakdown," Tommy says, kicking the door closed behind him. "Got to go home. Apparently crying so hard you throw up means you can leave."

"You cried until you threw up?"

"No. But that's funny to say."

Tommy throws his bag to the side and shuffles towards the couch. He sits down next to Ranboo and leans against his shoulder. Ranboo doesn't react apart from picking up his book and reading again.

He's very tired.

He leans against Ranboo a bit more and closes his eyes. Ranboo has that effect, he's just a very calming and peaceful fella. Apart from that time he yelled at Tubbo. None of them knew that Ranboo could yell until that moment.

Lifetip: never get Ranboo angry at you.

Closing his eyes, he feels his body slump slightly and he's laying in Ranboo's lap, a hand running through his hair.

It's peaceful.

Exhausted from crying for so long. He closes his eyes. And... relaxes.

Ranboo sighs softly, filled with fondness, "We'll figure it out Tommy. You'll figure it out. You have people who care."

Tommy hums, partly in recognition, partly because he wants Ranboo to be quiet.

And he goes to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Summary:

Phil is all like "what happened to you?" Referring to the bruise on his nose, Tommy says some asshole punched him in the face. Crime bros shenanigans, then Purpled shows up (Wilbur has left) and the two talk for the fun of it. Wilbur brings sushi and Tommy starts throwing the containers at him. Wilbur picks up Tommy and carries him around for like a good twenty minutes. Quackity persuades Wilbur to put Tommy down.

Wilbur drops Tommy, something that freaks him out a little bit. He realises that he's up very high and that freaks him out a little. He takes the stairs, hoping to get down onto the ground floor. He doesn't and instead starts crying in the stairwell. Phil shows up and is like "???" and Tommy freaks out a bit more. Purpled rocks up and hugs Tommy, and Tommy gets to go home due to his breakdown.



Welcome! I finally figured out how to put images in the endnotes, so here you go. This chapter was kind of a filler between beats, but next chapter something will start picking up. I'm quite excited for next chapter.

Do you like Purpled? And are interested in why he is saving up? Well, do I have the fic for you. [Reasons to Be Strong](#), which is another part of the [Acts of Spite](#) series. It's gonna be like 20k words dedicated to Purpled, and the first chapter is already out so... you should read it.

Also! You should join the [Discord](#)

There you get snippets, (i think there are like three cults?) and in-depth conversations about food and sushi.

In Which He and Floof Are Besties

Chapter Notes

WELCOME! Why did this chapter take so long? Because... fuck you that's why /lh basically this is a filler EXCEPT NOT REALLY? it's complicated. Basically this chapter was kinda difficult to write, but HERE, WELCOME.

throws chapter food.

Warnings: mentions of blood, general violence, guns

as always there is a summary at the end!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“You know,” Purpled says, when they’re supposed to be doing their work.

The heroes meeting is in two days, and Tommy knows this because Wilbur and Quackity have been doing their pre-meeting gossip. Because all of these guys are children, Tommy doesn’t know why he’s ever been scared of them.

(Okay sure Wilbur kicked him off a roof, and Phil would probably hurt him with zero hesitation. And he’s still slightly scared when they move too fast, but he’s *fine*.)

“We never got tacos from Kero’s,” Purpled finishes, as Wilbur laughs loudly at something Quackity says. “Which I consider a scam.”

“Wait, did you pay?”

“It was on the house,” Purpled says, leaning against the seat, watching Wilbur and Quackity out of the corner of his eye. Tommy ignores them, because fuck that, he can’t be bothered to deal with that.

Purpled sighs and drinks from his cup.

Tommy stares at him. “That’s... basically boiling.”

Purpled looks him in the eyes, before chugging the entire cup of what had to be almost boiling coffee. He doesn’t even react, before putting the cup down on the coffee table.

Tommy stares.

“What?”

Purpled shrugs. “I can drink boiling water.”

“What.”

“I can drink boiling water,” Purpled repeats. “I dunno why, I just can.”

Wilbur looks up, “Daniel?”

“What?” Purpled deadpans, and Tommy sometimes is shocked at how quickly he can spin his stories because Tommy forgets that right now Purpled’s fake name is Daniel. Because... he just does.

Wilbur smiles, and it’s with that look that he gets before he starts destroying shit. A look that he’s never done anything good with. Mostly giving Kristin terrible pickup lines, or insulting Phil.

Tommy pauses.

Wilbur grins and Quackity also looks like he's going through the stages of grief.

There's the ding of an elevator.

And Floof.

Standing in the elevator.

Quackity screams, the loudest that Tommy has ever heard anyone scream and jumps up so he's basically hiding behind Wilbur. Wilbur also scrambles backwards, as Floof approaches without a care in the world.

He trots closer, before stopping and tilting his head at the two of them.

He yaps.

Quackity is actually shaking.

Floof looks at Tommy, with as much sass as a dog can muster.

Before jumping up into the air and landing on Tommy's lap, there he curls up, before burying his face into Tommy's leg. He closes his eyes.

Tommy tries not to cry from how cute it is.

He runs his hand through Floof's fur, and Floof seems to relax more at this. He snuggles into Tommy's leg slightly more, and Tommy busies himself with running his fingers through the

bundle of fur that Floof is.

Sometimes Tommy wonders how small Floof is under all that fur, and if he looks like a rat. (He means that affectionately.)

Quackity stares at Tommy, something slightly wondrous in his eyes. “He likes you?” Quackity whispers.

Floof lifts his head, and looks at Quackity for a moment, who makes a noise and hides behind Wilbur. Floof obviously deems this a successful job, because he drops his head again and closes his eyes.

“Floof likes him,” Wilbur explains, “We thought Floof was going to kill Tommy, but now they’re besties.”

Quackity stares at him, eyes filled with fear.

“He’s not going to hurt you,” Tommy says softly, putting a hand on Floof’s back, mostly so that he couldn’t try. Even if he wanted to. Floof looks up at him lazily, like he’s the most offended he’s ever been in his life.

Floof will survive.

“How do you think I got this scar?” Quackity squeaks, “That is a demon in a dog’s body.”

“Hey! Don’t be mean to Floof,” Tommy says, running a hand through his fur. “He’s a sweetie pie, he’d never hurt anyone.”

“He knocked me into a glass coffee table and now I’m partially blind in one eye,” Quackity argues, still almost completely hidden by Wilbur, just peeking over his shoulder.

“He’s a sweetie,” Tommy coos. “He’s never done anything.”

“I literally have scars from this little shit,” Wilbur adds.

“He’s just a little man,” Tommy adds, “A little unproblematic king. One might say.”

“He is a demon dog,” Quackity says. He’s still hiding behind Wilbur and it’s honestly quite amusing to watch one of the top heroes hide behind Wilbur. Wilbur nods enthusiastically.

Purpled scrunches up his nose, before also petting Floof who did not react. “Floof is just a ball of fluff, you have to give him the same respect he wants back.” He sighs and looks at Quackity. “Come here.”

“Daniel—”

“Now.”

And much to everyone’s surprise, Quackity stands up and takes a few steps towards Floof. Floof tenses and looks up, Tommy keeps his hand on Floof’s back, so he can’t jump at Quackity and maul his face off.

Quackity freezes.

“No, no, no,” Purpled says, shaking his head, “You can’t let him know you’re scared of him. He’s just a dog.”

Quackity looks at him with wide eyes, pulling his beanie down more, and taking a couple of steps towards Floof. Floof didn’t react but Tommy was almost certain the little shit would find a way to attack him.

“Now,” Purpled instructs, “Hold out your arm.”

Quackity did so, holding out his arm.

Floof rose a little bit, sniffing at Quackity’s hand. He flinches slightly as Floof eventually drops so that he’s laying on Tommy’s leg again.

“Now,” Purpled says, “Pet him.”

Quackity takes a deep breath, sighing and reaching out his hand, he eventually manages to brush his fingertips against Floof’s fur, and Floof only gives him a lazy look in response. Quackity, apparently gaining his courage, pets Floof and Floof doesn’t react.

Then Floof looks up, and jumps.

He knocks Quackity to the ground (how?) And then stands on top of his chest. For a moment everyone stays completely still, as if that will make it so that Floof doesn’t just maul Quackity on the spot.

Floof yaps quietly, and jumps off Quackity, before looking at Tommy. He tilts his head slightly, and for a moment Floof just stares at Tommy.

They all stare at each other, and Tommy bursts out laughing.

Something about the real fear on Quackity’s face is just... so fucking funny. Quackity gets to his feet and stumbles slightly.

His phone buzzes in his pocket, and Quackity takes it out. He looks at whatever message it is, and he smiles slightly, before looking at the three of them.

He looks at Purpled, then at Tommy, then at Wilbur. “I gotta go, something came up.”

“Wait, what?” Wilbur says, “You didn’t say that anything—”

“Bye.” Quackity says, and in truth he basically runs out of there.

Everyone stares at each other.

“Well,” Purpled says, “That was weird. And something we totally shouldn’t look into at all.”

“Yup!” Tommy says, petting Floof who seemed more than happy to sit there and get attention from Purpled and Tommy.

Purpled eventually stands up, giving Tommy a wave and returning to... whatever the fuck he was supposed to be doing. Which led to a good question, what the fuck was *he* supposed to be doing?

He looks at Wilbur who seems to be slightly more comfortable. His feet are up on the couch, and he’s on his phone. Tommy glances at his phone, half debating to Tweet from Theseus’s account before deciding against it.

Wilbur looks up, and for a moment has a staring match with Floof. Floof apparently wins, because Wilbur swears and rolls his eyes.

Floof gets free from Tommy’s grip and jumps onto the couch next to Wilbur, he curls into a ball and Wilbur looks at him confused. Then at Tommy, like Tommy is the Floof whisperer, which... probably isn’t wrong.

Wilbur relaxes, before looking back at his phone.

Tommy opens Twitter. He finds (mostly to his shock) that ‘wilbur /neg’ is still trending. He stares at his phone for a moment. Before deciding he is going to put on the acting game of his life right now.

Ranboo would be proud.

All of those times they’ve both made stories up on the spot *so* quick to appease Tubbo all led up to this moment.

He lets his mouth fall open.

@arandomintern: WHAT?

Then he looks up at Wilbur. “What did you do?” Tommy yells.

Okay. He’s doing this out of spite. But he thinks he’s earned some revenge, and he is going to use all of this revenge the best he can. Is it a healthy coping mechanism? No. No it was not.

Was it the one he was using anyway?

Yes. Yes it was.

Wilbur looks at him. “Huh?”

“You’re trending on Twitter,” Tommy says, his voice cracking. “What did you do?”

“N—nothing?” Wilbur says slowly, he tilts his head, as Tommy stands up. “I didn’t do anything for once!”

“Did you kick someone off a roof?” Tommy walks over to Wilbur and shakes him back and forth. Wilbur let himself get shook and let himself go limp, which to an outsider would look hilarious. “Wilbur what did you do?”

“Nothing,” Wilbur says, still being shaken back and forth. “I didn’t even do anything! What would I have done?”

Tommy makes a noise which lets out part of the internalised anger he’s been feeling for so long. He flops onto the couch, and looks up at the roof blankly.

Ranboo would be so proud.

“Wilbur!”

“Tommy—”

Tommy grabs his phone, and scrolls. He ‘pretends’ to see Theseus’s Tweet and he sits up straighter. He takes a deep breath and looks Wilbur in the eyes.

“Arrest Theseus.”

“Huh?”

“Arrest him!” Tommy yells, “Fucking bastard,” he stands up and storms off. Planning to never explain it. “Fucking— ruining my life!”

[@arandomintern](#): FUCK YOU [@theseusiguess](#) I WILL LITERALLY KILL YOU

[@arandomintern](#): /hj

And he 'sulks' in his office for about an hour, when in reality he reads about shulker hybrids. Okay. He falls down a weird rabbit hole.

Look, he can feel his powers. He hasn't used them properly in a couple of weeks, and it's screaming to do something. However, he can't do anything right now, so he just sits there and tries to take his mind off it all.

He has been researching flowers, for no reason. Then he discovers that shulker hybrids could make things float because they often worked in botany (apparently they were good with plants) and then he falls down a whole rabbit hole of research.

That was why he was currently laying on his desk. Well half laying on his desk, he has his legs holding him up more, as they are folded under the table and holding him. Half his body is hanging off the side of the desk. His hair brushes against the floor, and he holds his phone out in front of him.

He is hanging upside down, that feels important to mention.

Because Wilbur opens the door, and he screams, stumbles back slightly.

"What are you doing?" Wilbur yells.

Tommy looks up at him, turning his head slightly. "Reading on shulker hybrids. Do you know that they can float? Also it's theorised that they can manipulate the water in plants to rise. That's so cool."

"How isn't all the blood rushing to your head?" Wilbur asks slowly.

Tommy shrugs a shoulder. “I can hang upside down for hours. So can Tubbo.”

“Why?”

“He trained to,” Tommy looks back at his phone. “I just can, I’m quirky like that.”

Wilbur looks horrified, which, yeah, that’s fair.

Tommy sighs, sitting up into a more socially accepted situation and rolls his eyes at Wilbur. If he wants to hang around like a bat or spider, who is Wilbur to judge? It’s not like Phil doesn’t sit on top of the fridge sometimes.

“So shulker hybrids can float right, along with being super tough. So, they can be thrown around a lot and it’s harder to kill them.”

“What, like you?”

Tommy looks at Wilbur, expression flat. “Are you being rude to hybrids?”

“Huh?”

“Just because my parents were avian hybrids—”

“That is not what I am saying at all.”

“Honestly, Wilbur, I expect better from you. First being cancelled by Theseus—”

“That was to fuck with you—”

“And now you’re being a dickhead,” Tommy decides. “I can have you cancelled for real this time.”

“Wait, no—”

Tommy pouts and stands up, “So shulker hybrids can also—”

Wilbur sighs, and there’s an expression on his face that Tommy doesn’t quite know how to interpret. He pauses, looking at Wilbur carefully. It looks like he’s in pain, he looks like how Tubbo does when you mention why he can shoot a gun so well.

Tommy tilts his head, “I’m messing with you, you’re not actually being a dick.” He says slowly.

Wilbur closes his eyes and sighs slightly. “It’s fine.” He says in a voice that implies it’s not fine in the slightest.

“Are you sure?”

“Stressed,” Wilbur eventually says, carefully, and Tommy knows the feeling of not wanting to spill his emotions. So he knows that this is exactly what it sounds like, distract the asker about one thing and then the original question is left.

Tommy gives him a look.

Wilbur sighs, “Fine, you gremlin.” And it’s filled with fondness that makes Tommy smile slightly too. “I am stressed. Techno is worrying me, he hasn’t responded to any of my texts. Quackity also appears to be stressed out of his mind, I found him crying in the bathroom the

other day and I'm worried about him. You had a breakdown yesterday, and I am very worried about you."

He sighs, but doesn't look Tommy in the eyes.

"That's not all," Tommy says slowly. "What else is up?"

Wilbur rolls his eyes, "It really doesn't matter, child."

"I am nineteen," Tommy says, like he isn't sixteen. "I have been paying my own bills for three years." The second bit is true at least.

Wilbur gives him a look. "There was just this thing, street art. It was super cool, like very well done. The colours and stuff were amazing— I've seen some of their stuff before, it's very cool. Jazz that's their name, it's all super cool. The way they use colours and patterns—"

"Wilbur."

"Fine, it was like a characterisation of me painted like the devil. There. Is that what you wanted?"

Tommy just looks at Wilbur for a long moment, trying to figure out what to say. He doesn't really... know what to say, because that's a pretty fucking intense thing. There are a lot of levels to unpack here.

Instead he tilts his head a little more. "Oh."

Wilbur rolls his eyes, "It doesn't even matter."

“It feels like it does,” Tommy responds.

With another eye-roll, Wilbur waves his hand. “It’s fine, I’ve dealt with worse, the art is actually really, really good this time. It’s super badass—”

“It’s affecting you,” Tommy says, cutting Wilbur off very effectively. “So it matters a little. You’re not a devil, you wish you were. You’re not that cool.”

“Toms.”

“I mean,” Tommy continues, “You’re pretty cool, but you’re not like devil cool. If anyone I know is devil cool it’s probably Tubbo. The almighty Tubbster, you’re like...” he looks at Wilbur. “A fish.”

“A fish?”

“A bit derpy, with no thoughts behind the eyes—”

“Hey!”

“But, people like you,” Tommy continues, “Well... some people don’t. But the people who like you, really like you and will defend you to the death. And the general public doesn’t know you like this tower knows you.”

Wilbur shifts on his feet.

“And yes, maybe you’ve done some shit things,” Tommy continues, “But that doesn’t make you a bad person, it just... makes you a person.”

Wilbur just looks at him, blinking a few times. He rubs his eyes.

“And sure...” Tommy says, because his thoughts are going and they will not stop. “You make some dodgy choices, I’ll be the first one to tell you. But you also make some good choices, you’re just a guy. You can’t... I dunno, carry the fucking world.”

Wilbur sniffs, and rubs at his eyes. “Why are you so mature?”

“Trauma,” Tommy deadpans. “But seriously, I’m not going to say don’t worry about public opinion, because that’s my job to make sure you care. But the public will never see you eating stir-fry with your hands, or standing in the elevator with neither of us pressing the button because of our first interaction.”

“I will cry,” Wilbur threatens.

“I will cry louder,” Tommy responds, “Don’t challenge me, my sanity is hanging on by a thread.”

Wilbur gives him a smile, and it’s so fond that it almost hurts. “Thank you, Tommy.”

“Hmm?”

Wilbur shrugs a shoulder, and this feels like one of those things that Tommy won’t understand anytime soon. It feels like one of those things he’ll understand later.

“Just, thank you.”

“For?”

Wilbur shrugs. “Being there, being the most reasonable person in this entire tower. I love everyone here but... most of them look at me like I’m some charity case, or some deity.”

And yeah... Tommy feels the charity case thing in his soul.

“I feel like that a bit too,” Tommy says, because... he’s not a liar. “That I’m some charity case, I’ve felt a bit like that for a while, I guess.”

“I was adopted,” Wilbur blurts out, and it’s almost funny. “When I was ten... by Phil. I don’t remember anything before that, whether that’s a trauma thing or something else. We dunno. And... for a long time I was just the kid that Phil got stuck with. The kid that just... was there, and no one really wanted me there.”

Tommy nods.

“I guess... a bad thing happened to me. And it’s changed how everyone looks at me, even Phil, he pretends it doesn’t. But I know it does. It feels like only people I met afterwards look at me like I’m not fragmented.”

And Tommy stands up, before throwing his arms around Wilbur.

He can’t really explain why.

Wilbur hates him... kinda. Not really, but kinda. Enough that it hurts, and enough that Tommy had been slightly scared to get too close, because Wilbur *could* do something, throw him out a window or something.

For a moment, Wilbur freezes. Almost completely, like every bone in his body is fighting away from this hug. Slowly he wraps his arms around Tommy’s shoulders and hugs him back.

“You’re not fragmented,” Tommy mutters into Wilbur’s shoulder.

And if Wilbur cries a little, Tommy doesn’t comment on it.

Eventually Wilbur lets go and rubs at his eyes, he takes a deep breath and straightens his shoulders. He looks at Tommy, before reaching out and ruffling his hair.

Tommy huffs.

“You look a bit like me,” Wilbur says, “Before I got good hair cuts.”

“Hey!”

There’s a buzz, and Wilbur grabs his phone. He looks at Tommy then at his phone, he sighs, “I am needed, duty is never older.”

Tommy nods slightly.

“Need a lift home?”

“Nah,” Tommy waves his hand, “I’ll let you know if anything changes.”

“Cool.” And Wilbur turns around and walks off.

And Tommy... feels warm, just very warm.

He shakes the feeling away, and sighs, sitting back down on his desk and swinging so that he’s hanging upside down off the side of his desk. Where he holds his arms out in front of

him and scrolls for a bit.

Eventually he decides he should be doing some work, and makes the decision to email people. Get things organised for the heroes meeting tomorrow (it is a fucking nightmare to organise).

He answers some more questions online, does some snippets of editing and just generally has a good time. His job doesn't really feel much like a job anymore, it feels like he's paid to scroll through Twitter and hang out with heroes.

Also all the emailing. He's suddenly become very good at telling people to fuck off politely.

At five o'clock, Tommy stands up and shoves his phone into his backpack. And slings it over a shoulder. He promptly ignores all the windows, despite the fact that he knows how beautiful the sunset looks.

It is nice, really nice. So nice that Tommy ignores it.

He opens a door.

The door falls to the ground.

He looks around, like something had happened. Before he steps over it, and picks up the door, before shoving it back in the doorway so that it looks like it's some sort of door. Then he decides that's good enough.

Then keeps on his way.

A short elevator ride later, he's on the bottom floor, giving Kristin a nod as he leaves.

“See ya, Kristin.”

“See you tomorrow,” she returns.

Tommy stops midstep, spinning around and facing Kristin. “Hey, are you busy for lunch tomorrow?”

She pulls a face.

“No.”

At that moment, like an act of some greater power. Phil walks around the corner, he freezes when he sees Tommy standing in front of the receptionist desk. Which... good, he's glad he has made that a fear response from Phil.

The great Philza Minecraft? Is simply defeated by talking to someone that he has some interest in.

“Hey, Phil!” Tommy yells, beckoning him over.

Phil looks like he's praying to something, and walks over, steps careful.

“Are you busy at lunch tomorrow?”

“No?”

“Nice,” Tommy grins, “Neither is Kristin. I am. So I guess you two will just have to get lunch together.”

“What?”

Tommy grins, and gives a mock salute, walking backwards towards the door. “It’s an honour serving you, Philza Minecraft and Kristin... I am not quite sure what your last name is, so I will just call you Kristin Kristinson.”

Kristin snorts.

“Hope you two enjoy your lunch tomorrow!”

And he turns around and starts running.

“Come back here you little shit—”

He slams the door in response.

Public transport is that, public, and he almost falls over when it stops. Before he darts out of the carriage and up the stairs.

He gets home at a good time.

Opening the door, he notices Purpled and Tubbo. How Purpled is here, is beyond him, considering that they both knock off at the same time.

Tommy and Purpled stare at each other for a moment.

“Purpled.”

“Tommy.”

“Tubbo,” Tubbo says his own name and that’s just hilarious, like no hesitation with how funny that is.

Tommy laughs, dropping his bag on the table and dropping the letter with it. He flops onto the couch next to Purpled, leaning against him and Purpled freezes in that way that only Purpled can.

It’s endearing.

Especially as Purpled throws him off the couch, and onto the floor and Tommy just stays there.

Then Tommy realises he was planning on going on patrol and he stands up. “Where’s my suit?” Tommy asks, he looks underneath one of the couch cushions and Tubbo grumbles the entire time.

“Bedroom,” Tubbo mumbles, “Hey Purpled, explain to me semicolons again.”

And like that, Tommy has his costume.

It hasn’t been that long since he’s last worn it... a couple of weeks, but he hasn’t been patrolling properly since the warehouse. He’s used his powers a couple of times, and maybe that’s why he’s here now.

His power is thrumming, a buzz underneath his skin, like an itch that he can’t quite scratch—he’s been able to ignore it pretty well throughout the day. But now it feels like it’s screaming in his head.

It almost hurts.

So Tommy knows three things, he knows he is very powerful at the moment. He knows that a big outburst of emotions could destroy lots of things, and he knows that he is ready to fight something.

“Oi,” Tommy says, peering out of his bedroom. Pinning his hood in place and adjusting the mask.

Purpled rolls his eyes and reaches into his backpack, throwing his own goggles and mask at him. “Works better.”

Tommy nods slowly, and switches out the mask. It is true, Purpled’s mask is better. The goggles and mask have been attached together, and this is good for him, mostly. It’s more difficult to fall off that way.

Tubbo rolls his eyes, “Oh, I need to drop everything for your patrolling. I am doing my *homework* Tommy, go patrolling another time.”

Tommy shifts from foot to foot, a movement that Purpled must be familiar with, because his eyes go wide for a moment. Purpled sighs.

“You look like you’re about to explode.”

“I might.”

“I’ll do it,” Purpled sighs, he takes Tubbo’s laptop off him, and Tubbo pouts. Which is rather amusing, for several reasons. Purpled rolls his eyes, again and glares slightly at Tubbo. But it’s a fond glare. “You have math homework to do.”

“Purpled.”

“Tubbo.”

Tubbo groans and stands up.

Tommy isn't quite sure when Tubbo and Purpled became besties, but he isn't complaining about it. Purpled adjusts himself on the couch slightly, grabbing a pair of headphones off the coffee table.

“Do you know how to—”

“Yes,” Purpled snaps.

Tommy puts his hands up in the air. “It's a lot of things happening at once, you gotta scan the police calls, the bugs to see if there's anything happening there. Keep track of the news and then boss me around.”

Purpled gives him a look. “I can do it, Tommy.”

“Can you though?”

Purpled glares a bit more. “I am literally—”

“One of the best mercenaries in L'Manberg, that does not mean you can do the tech support. Multitasking is very difficult and I understand if you can't do it—”

“Tommy.” Tubbo snaps.

“Sorry,” Tommy mutters, he grabs his ear piece, turning it on and taking a deep breath. “Are you sure you got this?”

“You are about to be stabbed—”

Tommy decides that is the perfect moment to launch himself out of the window, then use his powers to propel him off the ground and up into the air. For a moment he flies, and relishes in the feeling.

Then he lands and stumbles, eventually falling over, basically onto his face.

Purpled laughs into his ear. “I heard that.”

“Fuck off,” Tommy hisses, he gets back onto his feet. “I’m not used to using my powers, you dick.”

Purpled snorts, and Tommy really wishes he could flip them off.

For a bit, Tommy gets used to using his powers again. He had to use them in that chase with Phil, but that was different, he was running off of instinct, he really needs to be able to control what he’s doing.

For a while that’s all he does, hopping from building to building, and really living his best life. It’s almost peaceful, and like the early days when all he was really trying to do was control his mess of powers.

He lands on his feet eventually, and sighs, panting slightly. He realises that he’s darted all around, and that he is currently near that park he loves more than anything. He crouches on the building.

Purpled swears into his ear. “Guy with a gun, in the plaza. Threatening people, two blocks to your... West.”

“Left or right?”

“How do you not— away from the moon.”

So left then. Tommy nods and throws himself off the building, before his powers catch him and fling him across another building. For a moment he fumbles in the air and manages to catch himself, without falling.

He ignores the panic and the feeling of helplessness.

He’s in control.

With a deep breath he steadies himself and throws himself up in the air again, he soars and lands the way he’s supposed to be landing.

Throwing himself up again, he lands on top of a building the way that he’s supposed to. Perfectly and everything. He takes a deep breath, he is in control, this isn’t the feeling of being dropped.

He knows what he’s doing, he did not train for almost years to start panicking now.

“Tommy,” Purpled says, “This isn’t looking great.”

“What do you mean?”

“You might need backup,” Purpled explains, “Wait a sec. Looks like I’m extraction tonight.”

Tommy doesn't say anything, and instead taps his foot on the side of the building. Okay. Apparently there's a gun, he needs to figure out how to get rid of that. There could be people with guns stationed around the area. It's very hard for one person to really threaten people effectively in Logstedchire.

That's all a nice way of saying people from Logstedchire aren't easily scared. And there has to be more behind why seemingly one person seems to have all the control.

Now, Tommy could wait for Purpled.

But instead he jumps across the gap between the buildings and crouches as he approaches the side of the building.

The plaza. It's basically just a big square, with a fountain in the middle. Lots of kids play ball games there (despite it being off limits) and it's where teenagers tend to hang out. Either here or the park.

Standing in the fountain, is someone with a gun. People are sitting, hands on their heads. Tommy can see that two of them are exchanging glances, like they're making some sort of plan.

He stays there for a moment, no one seems to be in any danger, and perhaps it's better to figure out what's happening.

The person is in complete black, with a helmet looking situation. It looks like they're in all black tactical gear. Tommy crouches a bit closer to the building, and looks around.

There are about twenty people, sitting down. And Tommy knows that they're forming some sort of plan, he can see it in the way they're holding themselves. There's nothing that can be used as weapons, and Tommy is slightly nervous about what they're going to do.

“Where’s Theseus?” Thingo asks, and it’s very distorted, obviously there’s a voice modulator in the mask.

“Dunno,” someone says, “He’s had a while off, maybe he’s having a nap—”

“You think you’re funny?” The person in the tactical gear asks, and Tommy knows that this probably isn’t going to go well.

Mentally he prepares for a fight.

“A little. I was planning on doing stand-up comedy, how do you think that would go for me?”

Ah. Great. Someone with the exact same humour as Tommy, which is great, apart from the fact that this is not the time to be quipping, this is the time to be shutting the fuck up. Thanks random kid.

Tommy launches himself off the building, he lands on his feet, stumbling only slightly and standing in front of the boy who has decided that now is the time to be a comedian.

He smiles underneath his mask and waves at the person in tactical gear.

“Theseus,” they say. Good job, they’ve gotten the first part of his name right. They raise the gun, so it’s pointing at him.

Tommy just gives him a look, trying to give them as much sass as possible when all of his features are covered.

He brings up a shield, which is really just energy that moves so fast things bounce off it.

Ah. Weird glowy powers.

A bullet bounces off it, and Tommy drops the shield. He gives them a look, one that is supposed to say '*really?*'

Tommy sighs, he gathers his energy the best he can, it materialises in the air. Wraps around the gun, and Tommy yanks it from out of their hands.

The gun skids across the ground.

Tommy shrugs.

“Huh?” The person in tactical gears says.

Tommy resists the urge to sigh, he makes them drop to the ground with some density shifting. He looks around. Something about this was too easy, there was something wrong about this entire situation.

Too easy. Things weren't that easy for him.

The last time things were that easy he almost died.

He waits for a long moment, for something to drop. For something else to hit the ground, for something to go terribly wrong. He takes a few steps backwards, hesitation in his steps. Looking around, he scans for *anything*. But he can't find anything.

Is that seriously all?

Then something slams into his back.

Tommy tumbles to the ground, feeling the concrete ripping at the knees of his pants. Which is quite upsetting for several reasons, mostly because he really liked these pants.

He flips over, and notes that there's a gun in his face. Huh. Okay, not really something that he wants, but he can handle this.

He grabs the gun with both hands, and twists, it flies across the ground. Tommy kicks one of his legs up, and feels his foot connect with their face. They stumble back, and Tommy stumbles onto his feet.

Okay. Finally, a good fight. He can do this.

Five people. Three with guns. All wearing tactical gear—

He throws himself up in the air, twisting and landing on the shoulders of one of them. They fall to the ground. Tommy lands on their back, praying that wouldn't hurt too much and that they had insurance.

Tommy jumped up again, pushing himself up in the air slightly. He kicks his leg out, and gets one of them across the face.

He hits the ground and stumbles slightly, something gets hit into his shoulder and Tommy winces. Twisting himself around, he throws an arm up, and is vaguely aware of something hitting it.

Pain shoots through his arm, he grabs the metal bar that appears to be doing a lot of damage. He yanks it backwards, and falls backwards with it. Hitting the ground, he rolls over his shoulder and jumps back up onto his feet.

Tommy twirls the bar in his hand.

Someone swings a crowbar at him, and he swings the metal bar up in the air. The metal on metal echoes, and Tommy returns by swinging the metal bar at them.

He stumbles backwards, trying to get more distance. He flicks his hand up, hoping that the crowbar will fly out of their hands.

It doesn't.

Tommy claps his hands together, hoping for a spark. Nothing. He claps his hands together with more and more force.

Nothing happens.

He brings up the metal bar again, as something else is swung at him. Tommy ducks and stumbles back slightly. He claps his hands back together again, and there's a small spark. He does it again.

Okay, powers are working again.

He flicks his hand again, and one of the people tumble to the ground. Good. He ducks under another bar being swung and he pauses.

Tommy throws his hands out, and two more people fall to the ground. There's red all around him, like ribbons spiralling in the air. That's not normal.

Okay. Three people down, two more to go. He changes the density of the three on the ground, so that they're stuck there.

Throwing himself up in the air again, he soars for a moment. Before landing on the ground. Using the metal bar, he yanks someone onto the ground.

Pain shoots through his shoulder and he almost cries out in pain. Whirring around, he notices that the person in front of him has a knife, which is slightly bloody. He flings his hand out and the knife whirls in the air.

It hits the ground with a clatter, and Tommy pauses.

All of them are down.

The people who are sitting on the ground look at him, with grateful eyes. Tommy nods slightly, giving a two fingered salute.

He looks up.

On the wall, is a huge picture of a poppy.

Tommy stares at it for a long moment. First the flowers at that attack, and now here. He stares for a moment longer.

People behind him turn around, apparently also looking at the poppy. It's being projected onto the wall, he's not sure where from.

What?

Tommy turns around to the people who are currently pinned to the ground, due to the density shifting. He pauses again, it's honestly... odd. He looks at it for a longer moment, before taking a step backwards.

His shoulder is bleeding, and his arm really fucking hurts.

In the distance there's sirens, preferably the police so he doesn't have to deal with this for much longer. He looks at the people on the ground, still laying there. They're all unarmed, and he fully believes that these guys are capable of keeping them here for a short amount of time.

He looks at one of the people, tapping them on the shoulder, then points at the people on the ground.

She nods and Tommy looks up at the building.

He claps his hands together, sparks falling everywhere. He takes another deep breath, and jumps up in the air. He soars up, sparks coming out of his hands.

Landing on top of one of the buildings he stops.

Sitting on the ground and crossing his legs, he sighs, leaning up against the side of a building. He sighs softly and tries to look at the gash in his shoulder, he doesn't think it's that bad.

His arm hurts, he sits there for a longer moment.

His eyes feel heavier than ever, and he leans back against the side of the building. He sighs slightly, and closes them.

Just for a moment.

He's just resting.

A hand wraps around his shoulder, and he jerks awake.

It's Spectre. Crouched in front of him.

Tommy's stomach drops.

Spectre takes a few step backs, hands in the air. "I'm not going to do anything," Wilbur says, and it's similar to the voice that Wilbur uses when he's not Theseus, but not quite the same. "You need to get home."

Tommy blinks at him.

"You really need to get home," Wilbur looks over his shoulder. He adjusts the ski-looking goggles on his face.

Tommy stares at him for a longer moment, slowly he rises to his feet. There's a good distance between him and Wilbur, and he's willing to keep it that way. Wilbur takes a step or two backwards.

"I'm not going to do anything," Wilbur explains, his voice is level. "You need to get home. I'm slightly better than arresting someone who was asleep a minute or two ago."

Tommy nods, "*Thank you,*" he signs at Wilbur.

He jumps off the side of the building, his powers catching him. He darts across the top of the buildings, before looking over his shoulder to make sure Wilbur isn't watching him or trying to follow him.

He's not, in fact Tommy can see Spectre darting across the buildings the opposite way.

After a while, he gets there. To his apartment. He lands on the fire escape and clambers up to one of the windows. There he knocks, making sure no one is watching him. No one is watching him, which is more than ideal.

The window gets opened and Tubbo stands there for a moment, he looks stressed and slightly breathless. “Tommy.”

“Tubbo?”

Tubbo grabs his arm.

“Tommy,” Tubbo repeats, dragging him in through the window. “Where have you been? I was so fucking worried about you, you weren’t responding to Purpled and we had no clue where you were and—”

“I’m fine, Tubbo,” Tommy says calmly, he lands on the ground, with a thump. “I’m only bleeding a bit. What’s wrong?”

Tubbo takes a deep breath, “You scared me, dickhead,” Tubbo drags Tommy up onto his feet and hugs him tightly.

Tommy looks between Ranboo and Purpled, then back at Tubbo. They all look more worried than usual. He looks between all of them again, making sure that he’s not imagining something.

“What’s wrong?” Tommy asks slowly.

“They changed the vigilante laws,” Purpled says, and he is somehow sitting on the fridge. Which isn’t that odd, it’s just something he does sometimes. He likes to be up high, what can Tommy say, he’s a bit the same.

“Huh?” Tommy says, looking between the three of them. “What do you mean? They change them all the time, we agreed to stop keeping up with them—”

“Tommy,” Tubbo says carefully. “Does anyone else know you’re Theseus?”

“No. Well— yeah.”

“Fuck,” Tubbo says, looking at Purpled. “Who?”

“Techno,” Tommy says, looking between the three of them. “What’s wrong?”

Tubbo takes a deep breath. “Tommy, they’ve made harbouring vigilantes illegal.”

Tommy blinks at them. “Yeah?”

“Tommy,” Ranboo says, his voice quiet. “Anyone who knows someone who is a vigilante, they can get jail time if they don’t hand them in.”

“What?” Tommy asks weakly, looking from Purpled to Ranboo to Tubbo.

They look at each other, then look at Tommy.

“What does this... mean? For us?” Tommy asks slowly, he looks between Purpled, Ranboo and Tubbo. Tubbo seems to shift on his feet, like the eye-contact is bothering him, “Guys... what does this mean?”

Purpled sighs, hopping off the fridge. “It means that if either you or I get caught. Tubbo and Ranboo could get jail time for as long as we could.”

“Oh.” Tommy says, like a true intellect.

This is fine. This is more than fine. Everything is great, this is fantastic.

It’s only that Techno could hand him in and then, boom, so many more problems would arise and he’d lose any opportunity at life.

Not anxiety inducing at all.

"Fuck— okay, so I need to talk to Techno about this, like, urgently."

Ranboo gives him a look, one that implies that he should not talk to Techno about this at all and instead just pretend this all went away. Tommy runs a hand through his hair, and he starts pacing up and down the small kitchen.

He can almost feel Tubbo, Ranboo and Purpled trying to figure out what to do. They’re all giving each other looks, and then glancing at Tommy nervously.

That’s great, but Tommy is about to lose it. Tubbo and Ranboo could get jailed... for what? Helping out their friends? Fuck, Wilbur and Phil harboured Techno when he was a vigilante. In what world is this fair? Who allowed this to fucking happen? How did this get through? Tommy sighs and runs his hands through his hair again.

What. The. Fuck?

“Well boys,” Tommy says, clapping his hands together. “It’s been nice to know you all, while we have freedom of movement.”

“Wait, what?”

Tommy sighs again, and sits down on the couch. His head is spinning, there's too much going on there and he can't sort it out. Most of it's just panic, so he sits there, in his panic. Realising that he's probably going to start crying soon.

He takes a deep breath. "Surely..." he looks at Tubbo and Ranboo. "You can say we manipulated you or something—"

"Tommy—"

"That you didn't have a choice," Tommy decides on quickly, he bounces his leg. Mostly because he can't actually stop himself. He needs to move, he needs to do something and this appears to be working quite well.

Again, he sighs, a soft sigh at that too.

"I don't want to say that," Tubbo says after the beat of silence. "You're my friend Tommy, and I'm standing by you. No matter what. I'm not going to lie, it's my decision to help you out and I'll gladly go to jail."

"Tubbo—"

"Tommy," Tubbo's voice is stern, yet careful and just... so much care interlaced with the words that it almost hurts. "You have people on your side. You have Ran and Purpled and me."

Tommy takes a deep breath. "I don't want you two to jeopardize your freedom for me."

"Eh," Ranboo shrugs, like it doesn't mean the world to him. "I don't mind. I'll just teleport us out of jail."

“Pandora’s Vault.” Purpled mutters.

Tubbo laughs, “They are not going to put us into Pandora’s Vault.”

“Oh shit,” Tommy says, his smile dropping, “They can put me into Pandora’s Vault.”

The silence says all they need to know about that. Tommy looks at Purpled, and Purpled shrugs.

“Free food.” Purpled says and they all burst out laughing.

Like laughing, laughing. They’re going crazy with stress, Tommy is about to lose his mind. He is quite scared for the safety of his friends, and that Techno will rat him out and like that... it’s over. Like that, everything’s done. These past two years have been for very little, and it’s over.

But he’s still laughing so hard he can’t breathe.

Or that might be a panic attack.

But he thinks he’s laughing, because his stomach hurts and there are tears in his eyes. He clutches at his stomach as he laughs.

Tubbo and Ranboo have also lost it, even Purpled is smiling. He’s not laughing, but he’s smiling the brightest that Tommy has ever seen him.

Tommy laughs a bit longer, and looks up at the roof. Trying to control his laughter, he does so and looks at the roof for a moment longer.

Before they all looked at each other, and burst out laughing again. Laughing until they couldn't breathe, as Purpled just grinned. It was... nice, to just laugh like stupid teenagers.

And maybe he can just... ignore everything that's happening. Until tomorrow at least.

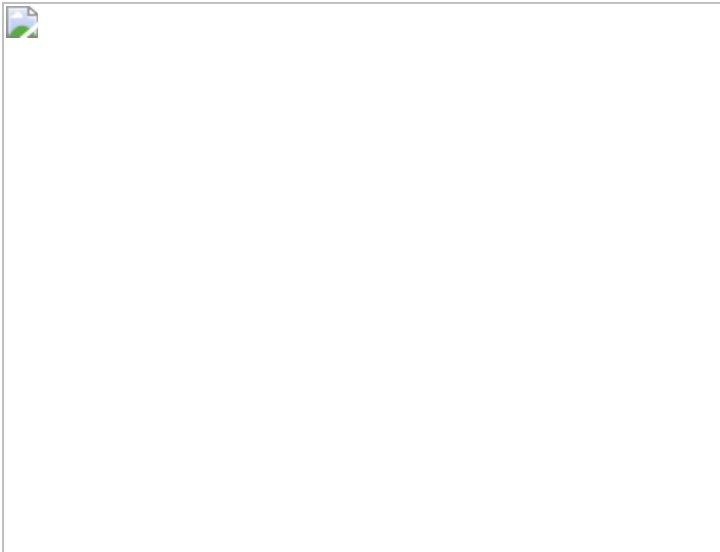
Chapter End Notes

Summary:

Tommy vibes with Purpled. Wilbur and Quackity are gossiping about nothing and everything. Floof shows up and makes Quackity befriend him. It goes well. Quackity nopes on outta there. Purpled leaves. Tommy sees that Wilbur is cancelled on Twitter and he uses his acting skills to start yelling and then he sulks. He chills in his office and Wilbur rocks up.

They have a bonding moment. Which is wholesome.

Tommy goes home, (setting up Kristin and Phil like a chad). Purpled's at his house, he goes on patrol. There is another random attack, and this time there is a poppy projected onto the wall. He falls asleep after patrol, Wilbur wakes him up and tells him to go home. He does not attack Tommy, and instead lets Tommy go home. He gets home and Tubbo is freaking out a little. The vigilante laws have been changed, so that in theory Tubbo and Ranboo can be arrested for just as long as Tommy can (for helping him).



Hello all, I have decided that I am going to *promote* some of my favourite fics. And I might as well put it here, today I have two recs, because I am just QUIRKY like that:

[the 4 vices](#) by [pastelwolfie](#) - basically think of like black widow and level 16 and then put purpled in it. it's very good, and one of my favourites right now.

[Being a Vigilante is Hard when you go to Family Therapy with the People who Hate you](#) by [SpiderSpoodle](#) and [zzsamzz](#) - it is one of my favourite vigilante fics like actually. it's so good and well written, i recommend so much. It deserves so much more love, if you like TINAAOS you will probably like this one too!

If you want snippets and sneak peaks of TINAAOS, join the [discord](#)! There we talk about the existence of attics, freak people out about the endings and scream about other fics. It's a good time, and a bit of a chaotic clusterfuck. Which we love for us!

edit: also yes, we are off anon now awhufedjxv, i forgot to mention

In Which Tommy Attends a Meeting

Chapter Notes

AYUP. I have an 11k chapter. Food ig. Uhhhh this chapter was very fun to write, especially Tommy being a smart bitch (affectionate). I hope y'all enjoy. There is a summary at the end for forgetful people, or whoever.

Warnings: medical talk (pretty graphic), drug use

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Apparently they change one vigilante law and everyone loses their fucking minds. Tommy decides that whoever had a hand in changing the whole harbouring vigilante law thing, did not tell anyone else.

He just has a funny feeling about it —

“What the fuck?” Phil yells, “They didn’t think to alert us? To get our say?”

Just a hunch, that they didn’t tell the heroes.

“Who authorised this?” Phil yells, and he looks at Tommy. Tommy shrugs, which appears to be the answer that he was looking for. “Tommy, I need you to look into who authorised this. What the fuck? They’re supposed to alert us first, at least give us warning?”

Tommy nods, and opens the laptop. Phil continues to pace back and forth around the kitchen area. It’s almost funny. Because don’t get him wrong, Phil fully supports this amendment, he does not support the rush it was done with.

There’s some sort of cruel, (and hilarious) irony in that.

Wilbur rocks up five minutes later, Tommy knows this because he is a lot calmer than Phil. He walks in, holding a coffee, he sighs, looking between Tommy and Phil and then walking over to the counter.

“Did you know about this?” Phil asks, because of course he does.

Wilbur shakes his head, “Well... I knew before this morning. Most people did though. Was on patrol, got the notification on my goggles, and then...” he shrugs, “Kept patrolling I guess.”

Phil groans, “Why are you all up at midnight?”

“Work.” Wilbur deadpans, “I went to bed at four, that’s pretty early for me.”

Phil sighs, “I raised you better than that.”

Wilbur sips at his coffee, “You obviously did not.”

He sighs a bit louder, and Phil basically flops over the top of the counter. “You had a healthy sleep schedule before you moved out.”

“That, I did.”

Phil sighs, and it sounds almost comically tired. “Okay. Weird attack yesterday, Theseus at the scene. New vigilante laws without any reasoning as to why that is.”

“You have lunch with Kristin today,” Wilbur notes, not looking up from his coffee, but he’s grinning like a smug little shit. And Tommy matches that grin easily, looking up from the laptop. “Can’t miss that.”

“Wil.”

“Father.”

Phil rolls his eyes, “You’re grounded. Don’t grin like that, we’re just getting food.” Wilbur grins wider. “Stop grinning like that, get your own love life to worry about—”

“Aha!” Wilbur yells, “You admit this is your love life.”

Phil glares at him, and Tommy is shocked that Wilbur doesn’t wither underneath it. If Philza Minecraft (the man himself) glared at Tommy like that, he would simply pass away. Instead Wilbur just sticks out his tongue.

“We are friends. Go and get your own friends to worry about rather than your father’s.”

“Shockingly enough,” Wilbur deadpans, “People don’t like my glorious pickup lines. And I have crippling commitment issues,” to round it all off, he gives finger guns.

Phil facepalms.

“Tommy,” Wilbur says, leaning over to him. “Do you have an interesting social life that I can interact with and bother?”

Tommy pushes him away by his forehead, not looking away from the laptop. “If I did, you would not know about it.”

“Come on,” Wilbur groans, prodding Tommy in the cheek. “You’re young. Tell me all the gossip, all of the drama.”

“Fuck off,” Tommy swats at him, and Wilbur must decide now is the time to back off. He scans the document for a moment longer.

Now. Every act like this that can possibly affect heroes, is supposed to be signed off by at least half of the heroes currently on the payroll. In emergency situations either Phil or Puffy can sign them. He thinks Dream can do it too?

It’s empty. The part that needs at least *a* hero to sign is empty.

Tommy stares at it for a longer moment, before looking up at Phil. “It’s not signed.”

“Huh?” Phil asks, he runs around the counter and looks at the laptop. “What do you mean it’s not signed?”

“It’s not signed,” Tommy explains, “It’s blank.”

Phil takes the laptop and holds it up, he squints at the empty space. “Are you kidding me? They can’t do that, there are protocols in place.”

Wilbur sips at his coffee, “Protocols they make, therefore they can break them.” Wilbur looks at Phil and shrugs, “They’ve been doing it since I was like... eleven, it’s not my fault that there’s loopholes for days.”

Phil groans. “When I was your age I had a kid to look after, and you’re just... insulting me.”

“Yup,” Wilbur grins, “Wait, don’t offend my son like that.”

“Huh?” Tommy says.

“Fundy,” Wilbur grins, just a bit wider. “My little champion.”

Phil rolls his eyes, “Fundy is the first hero that shadowed him. Wilbur would’ve been... twenty?”

“Yup.” Wilbur grins, “My little champion.”

“And the last hero in-training Wilbur had,” Phil adds, giving Wilbur a look. “For someone with attachment issues, you got very attached.”

Wilbur shrugs, sipping at his coffee again, his coffee that Tommy is almost sure is still boiling. “My little champion deserves the world, Henry, where is Fundy?”

“Fundy is not in the office,” Henry says, tone level and very polite. Which, good for him. “He has the night shift tonight, would you like me to send him a message from you?”

“No, thank you!” Wilbur says, his tone is shockingly polite. He turns to Tommy, and his tone drops straight away. “Okay gremlin, why did no one sign it?”

Tommy shrugs, “Dunno. They *can* run paperwork like this through in emergencies, but this isn’t an emergency. So for example... they could sign off on sending Phil on a super dangerous mission, without his consent, if national security was involved.”

“Wait, what?” Phil looks at Tommy. “They can do what?”

“They can technically send you guys anywhere,” Tommy explains, “Well... probably not you Phil, you’re loaded. If you get fired it doesn’t matter. But like... Fundy, for example, I doubt he’s a millionaire. They can just drain your work bank accounts if you don’t agree to their missions, as it’s a matter of national security.”

“What?” Wilbur asks, sounding a bit breathless. “They can drain our accounts?”

Tommy pauses. “It’s... in your contracts?”

“I didn’t sign my contract,” Wilbur looks at Phil, “That’s a clause? That they can drain the account that our pay goes into?”

Phil looks concerned, like... very concerned. He looks at Tommy, blinking a few times. “Are you kidding?”

“No?”

Phil sighs.

“You didn’t get a lawyer?” Tommy says, “To read through your contract?”

“I did —” Phil pauses. “Oh. Those fucking—”

“Anyway,” Tommy presses on, deciding they can’t get into this today, “Basically. There’s a clause that states things don’t need to be signed off on in dire circumstances. However, I’m not sure if this counts as a dire circumstance. This seems like one of the acts that should’ve gone through the government and the heroes.”

Wilbur glances at Phil again, before sitting back at the counter and groaning. He hits his head against the counter. Not hard. At least Tommy hopes so, because Wilbur can’t afford to lose any more brain cells. He might hurt himself too much that way.

The elevator opens, and Puffy walks out. (Or The Captain, depending on who you asked.) Tommy hasn’t really met her yet, he’s seen her in the halls and walked past her. But often had his arms full with papers, or was busy trying to figure out how the printer worked.

Most people know the basics of what The Captain looks like, although she no longer works out in the field (as far as people knew). Half white and half brown hair, a kind face, but the sorta look that means she could beat you up.

She is a lot shorter than Tommy, he's not sure by how much. However, she has a look behind her eyes, her face is kind, but something in her eyes reminds Tommy of Tubbo. That look of being over this shit and having seen more than one person should ever see, it was almost impressive. She looks like an old combat general, and in many ways she might be one of those.

Once she was well known for her costume. A black and gold captain's coat, a red shirt, and being extremely powerful. From what Tommy remembers, Puffy has a very good power, he just can't remember what that is.

Puffy looks at him, "Hello, Tommy."

"Oh. Hi." Tommy says, like the true big brained person he is. Which is funny for several reasons. "I'm Tommy."

Puffy just gives a supportive smile, then looks at Phil. "It appears he's slightly star-struck Phil."

"He does that sometimes," Phil says and it's filled with enough fondness that Tommy hates it more than anything. Tommy just looks at him, expression flat. "You good, mate?"

"It's Puffy," Tommy whispers like that explains anything, and in his head it explains everything. "She's *so cool*."

Puffy laughs at that, and waves a hand, "Phil were you contacted about this? The amendment to the vigilante act?"

“The law of doom,” Tommy mutters to no one in particular, eyes back on his laptop. He feels everyone's eyes on him. He blinks a few times, before moving back and forth, shifting on his feet. “What? I’ll remember that better.”

Wilbur rolls his eyes, and kicks Tommy in the side of the leg.

Oh. This means war.

As someone who has lived with Tubbo for years, he is more than qualified to fight silently.

“No,” Phil says, “No one was contacted about it.”

“They can’t just do that.”

Tommy stomps on Wilbur’s foot and Wilbur winces. He looks at Tommy, betrayal in his eyes, Tommy grins at him, wide and bright. He flips Wilbur off, before glancing nervously to see if Phil and Puffy notice them.

They do not.

“Well obviously they can,” Phil says, leaning against the back of the counter. His back is to them, and Wilbur takes advantage of that.

He whacks Tommy in the arm, and Tommy doesn’t even flinch.

He gives Wilbur a look, *really, that’s the best you can do? You’re a hero?* Wilbur’s scowl gets a little bit deeper.

Good.

“But,” Puffy says, “They can’t because the protocols are in place. There’s a reason for that, and I really don’t think it’s just for fun. They can’t break them.”

“They made them,” Phil sighs, “They can break them. There’s no independent body stopping them. They’re the independent body, they can do whatever the fuck they want. Nothing is stopping them.”

Tommy kicks Wilbur in the leg.

Wilbur makes a noise, and he whips around to look at Tommy. “You dick.”

Phil turns around, he looks between the two of them. Before sighing. “Wilbur, stop pestering Tommy.”

“What?” Wilbur yells, “I didn’t even do anything!”

“Around this side of the counter,” Phil says with no hesitation. Wilbur huffs and walks around the other side of the counter.

Tommy starts ripping up a napkin to throw at the back of Wilbur’s head. He does it quietly, ripping up the napkin then rolling those bits up into a ball. Because he’s just that smart, and has never made a mistake.

Puffy sighs, tiredly, “This was not an emergency, this was something that goes through parliament and us. The vigilante act needed eighty percent of the tower to agree, how come making amendments doesn’t need any?”

“Because,” Phil says —

And Tommy tunes them out, because he's just simple like that. And this matters a lot more about whatever political, law thing they're talking about.

He rolls up another napkin part and adds it to his pile.

Because he's that smart, he tunes back in.

"There's nothing regulating them," Phil explains, "So they can do whatever the fuck they want. Technically."

"Then why are we here?" Puffy asks. "And what is my job then?"

Phil pinches the bridge of his nose.

"To make the public happy," Wilbur adds darkly.

Okay, Tommy feels way out of his depth. All these nerds are talking about things he understands but not completely. So instead of listening and trying to understand (why would he do that?)

He pelts a bit of napkin at Wilbur's head.

It bounces off the back of his head.

And Tommy knows Wilbur feels it, because he straightens up just a little bit more. His hands go up so they're gripping the counter slightly. Like he's getting ready to turn around and punch Tommy in the nose.

Which maybe.

But he'd Tweet about it at least.

He throws another bit of napkin at Wilbur's head.

Then another.

Another one, and Wilbur doesn't react.

For an only child he has pretty good patience.

And one more for good luck—

It hits Wilbur on the back of the head.

Wilbur spins around and vaults the counter, and Tommy screeches. He stumbles backwards. He can't ignore the immediate fear that is in his first screech, but he can see that Wilbur is grinning.

Tommy screams again, mostly for fun. He leaps up onto the counter, and jumps off and past Phil and Puffy.

He scampers across the floor, before looking over his shoulder. Wilbur is standing on top of one of the chairs, glaring at Tommy. Tommy grins at him.

Phil sighs. "Boys."

“Let them have their fun,” Puffy says, the look in her eyes is... nostalgic almost, a sort of sadness that comes with time passing.

Tommy takes this as an opportunity to flip off Wilbur.

Wilbur’s eyebrows shoot up, and he just grins slightly.

Oh shit.

Tommy looks at him for a moment longer, and he shrieks.

“Tommy.” Phil sighs, and Puffy swats at him.

“Fuck off!” Tommy yells, pretending that the fear in his voice is fake. It mostly is, there is just something that is still slightly terrified.

Wilbur jumps off the chair, and reaches for Tommy.

And the reaction that Tommy has, is completely and utterly an accident. He has very little control over the actions that take place.

He grabs Wilbur’s outstretched arm, twists around so that he’s facing the same way as Wilbur. And flips him over his shoulder.

There’s a thump, and Wilbur hits the ground.

“Holy shit,” Puffy says, rushing over, “Wilbur are you okay?”

Wilbur groans from on the floor. “Fuck.”

Tommy stares, in what he’s going to call complete horror. “Wil, I am so sorry.”

Wilbur groans, “Fucking hell, Tommy, where did you even learn that?”

“It’s just a shoulder throw,” Tommy defends, “Most people can do that! I am so sorry.”

Wilbur stays on the ground for a moment longer, staring up at the roof.

Phil walks up next to Tommy, he nods approvingly. “Impressive. It was very clean, looked rather graceful. Henry, do you have the recording?”

“I record everything that goes on in the building,” Henry says, “And I have already sent the video clip to you, Technoblade, Wilbur Soot and Thomas. Captain, would you like a copy of the video?”

“I want nothing more,” Puffy says.

Wilbur groans again, this time out of frustration and leans his head against the floor. “I am never going to live this down.” He sighs again, and it’s almost funny, except Tommy feels very bad. “Beaten by a child.”

Tommy doesn’t even rise to the bait.

“Hey,” Wilbur says, getting up onto his feet. “It’s fine. Techno body slammed me through a glass coffee table and then tried to kill me. Everyone has a story like that,” He glances at Phil. “When I was ten Phil tried to ruffle my hair and I broke his wrist, it’s more common than you think.”

Phil nods, “Seriously. I have been stabbed, and had several bones broken by these guys. That’s nothing.”

Tommy nods slowly, “Are you okay then?”

“Apart from my pride, and my ego. Yeah.” Wilbur says, he sighs and looks at Phil. “Phil, Tommy’s being all sad.”

Phil laughs, “Tommy. Wilbur’s sulking because you’re sad.”

“Wilbur’s breathing my air.”

“He’s looking out my window!” Wilbur says.

Okay, for an only child, Wilbur really knows what having a sibling is like.

(Well... Tommy’s technically an only child too, but he has Purpled, and Purpled has always kinda been a bit like a sibling. And Wilbur has Techno. Now that he thinks about it, neither of them are really only children.)

“He’s talking weirdly,” Tommy argues, refusing to look at Wilbur. “In fact he’s breathing, can you stop that?”

Phil sighs.

Puffy laughs, and it’s incredibly fond.

Wilbur gasps, “Tommy!”

Tommy rolls his eyes, and flips Wilbur off, not even looking at him. Just waving his hand in his face, Wilbur is apparently not a fan of this, because he hits Tommy's hand away without even looking.

Phil sighs, standing between the two of them. "Okay, fun's over. We have adult shit to discuss."

Wilbur groans, "Am I adulting today?"

"We're all adulting today," Puffy mutters, "If I have to, you have to. You are twenty-four Wilbur. You can handle being an adult for a couple hours while we have our meeting."

"But I wanna gossip with Quackity," Wilbur groans, the three of them set off and Tommy stays where he is.

Phil looks over his shoulder, and gestures for Tommy to follow, something he does with a few running steps before walking behind the three of them.

They get into the elevator, and Tommy shoves his hands into his pockets to stop them from shaking. He takes a deep breath and looks at the buttons.

Wilbur also looks at the buttons, then at Tommy.

"I'm not doing it," Tommy shrugs easily.

Wilbur huffs and presses the button to the floor.

It's quiet for a moment, almost nice, but Tommy can't have this in this economy.

“So,” Phil starts, and Tommy looks over his shoulder. “Today’s the hero meeting. Basically once a month, or whenever someone calls one, we all have a meeting, so everyone’s there. So we discuss everything happening around the city.”

“Who’s everyone?”

Phil sighs, as if he looks pained trying to think of them all. “Uh. So we have. Techno, me, Wilbur, Quackity, Fundy, Puffy, Dream, Foolish, Sapnap, George. I’m forgetting people, I know I am.”

Puffy sighs, “Top ten heroes.” she explains, “They’re the regular ones, but anyone’s allowed to sit in. We might have some more people, Quackity appears to quite like Daniel. You’ve met Daniel right?”

Tommy nods.

Considering last night Purpled was directing him around while he patrolled. Tommy thinks he knows “Daniel” pretty well.

“Oh and Sam,” Phil says. “Anyone can’t make it?”

Puffy huffs and pulls out her phone, she clicks a couple times. “Techno’s given his apologies for not being able to make it. Sapnap has to leave before ten and that’s everything. Sam might leave earlier though, I’m not sure.”

Tommy sighs, “Who knew being a superhero was so fucking boring? Meetings.”

Puffy laughs. “I certainly didn’t expect so many meetings when I was chosen as a hero. Don’t be a hero kid,” Puffy says, “It’s so boring, being a vigilante would be so much better—”

Wilbur and Phil look at her.

Puffy makes an apologetic noise, “Sorry, I forgot that you two are like that.” She rolls her eyes and looks at Tommy. “What’s your opinion on vigilantes, Tommy?”

Uh. Okay.

Tommy shifts on his feet slightly, he can feel Wilbur’s eyes on the back of his head, and in complete honesty he hates it. He shifts a bit more, then realises that Puffy is more badass than Wilbur and Phil combined.

He sighs, “They’re alright,” Tommy says, “I can appreciate the work they do. They’re not without their flaws, but neither are heroes.”

And Puffy... she looks almost impressed, she nods once, before looking ahead again. “That’s oddly mature of you.”

“I am legally an adult,” Tommy mutters, “Why does everyone forget that I am legally an adult?”

“Because you look like you’re sixteen,” Wilbur adds.

Tommy flips him off.

The elevator whirs and Tommy hates how that makes his stomach lurch. He needs to calm the fuck down. He takes a deep breath, and grabs onto the bar next to him.

This is fine. This is fine. This is *fine*.

Out of the corner of his eye, he watches Wilbur’s face twist into one of concern. He doesn’t say anything, and for that Tommy is more than grateful. Tommy tries to shake away the

nerves.

There is no reason to be nervous right now.

“So,” Puffy says, and her tone is incredibly even. “Would you be okay taking notes? Would that work?”

Tommy nods.

The elevator stops, and Tommy steps out first. More than grateful to be out of the elevator, it’s claustrophobic and Tommy hates it. He’s never been great with small spaces, but everything is.

Everything is a lot right now.

Wilbur grabs his arm, and Tommy jumps.

“You okay?” Wilbur asks.

“Mhmm.”

“You seem a bit jumpy,” Wilbur says, and he looks concerned enough that it twists something in his stomach. “You okay?”

Tommy nods.

Wilbur gives a look that means he thinks differently.

And somehow Tommy wonders when he started knowing Wilbur well enough that he can tell his different looks apart.

Wilbur flings an arm around Tommy's shoulders, and Tommy much to his shock doesn't even flinch. He relaxes slightly and lets Wilbur drag him towards the meeting room.

Puffy and Phil appear to have gone in.

Wilbur stops in front of the door, arm still around Tommy's shoulders. In a way that feels surprisingly natural. "Okay Tommy, this is a rite of passage. First meeting at the tower. For my first meeting I broke a glass, for Techno's he threw me across the room."

Tommy takes a deep breath.

"You got this." Wilbur says.

"I got this."

"You got this!"

"I got this!"

And Wilbur opens the door.

The meeting room is... exactly what he thought it would be. It's a long table with some fancy looking chairs. Against the back wall is a bookshelf, filled with what mostly look like different books related to law.

However there is a photo resting on it. It's a huge group photo, and Tommy can pick out the pink hair that is Techno. And if Tommy has to guess, he'd say that it was a group photo of most of the heroes and people who work with them.

Dream is sitting on the table, legs crossed and mask firmly on. Although it's lifted up slightly so that his mouth isn't covered.

Glitch... (or 404 he went through a recent rebranding and goes by both) is sitting at one of the chairs, feet up on the table. His hair is slightly darker than it looks like in the photos, and there's something startling about his heterochromic eyes, because they contrast so much. One is blue, the other is brown, it's rather startling. He's not wearing the goggles that have become his brand, instead he's wearing jeans and a hoodie, he looks rather comfortable, all things considered.

Next to Glitch, is Sapnap, someone Tommy has run into once or twice before. He looks about the same as he does in the photos. Black hair, a wide grin on his face and a bandana that appears to be glued to his forehead.

Phil and Puffy are sitting closer to the head of the table, and they're both talking to Quackity. Quackity looks concerned, and Tommy files that away into the back of his brain.

Purpled is sitting on the floor, leaning against the wall. (Tommy thinks he's sleeping.) His eyes are closed and he's deathly still. But Tommy knows that Purpled can just sit like that.

Sitting at the table, like a normal person, is Melicertes. He has a book open, and is reading quietly. Despite the fact that Dream and his friends are being as loud as fuck. He has brown hair, and in general just a kind face. He appears to be wearing his own merch, which is a fucking power move and a half.

"Wilbur!" Someone announces, and Wilbur looks up.

It's a man with orange hair, and a few white strips through their hair. His face is... sharp, is the best way to describe it, his face is sharp, but his eyes are gentle. It reminds him a bit of

Ranboo for a reason he can't quite place. He basically runs up to Wilbur, and flings his arms around his shoulders.

Wilbur laughs and hugs him back, "Hey, Fundy. It's been a while."

"You could say that," Fundy mutters into his shoulder, he lets go of Wilbur and grins widely. "You'll never guess what happened on my break— basically I went to stay overseas right?"

And like that Tommy zones out of that conversation, and instead takes a seat next to Melicertes. He seems more peaceful, and Tommy needs that energy at the moment. He's not quite ready for the energy that Dream's friends provide, or the seriousness that Phil and Puffy appear to have.

"Hello," Melicertes says, "I'm Foolish."

"Uh..." Tommy fumbles for a moment. "Like... is that your name? Or are you just using an adjective to describe yourself?"

"Both," he grins.

"Right. I'm Tommy— Thomas Underscore if you wanna get real fancy, but I just go by Tommy."

"Underscore," Foolish repeats slowly, a curious expression on his face. "Where does that come from?"

"My..." Tommy thinks for a moment, explaining his situation with Ranboo and Tubbo is complicated. "Little brother, I suppose. I'm his guardian, I'm only a couple years older. It's complicated— I'm from Logstechire."

"Ah." Foolish says, because that really does explain most of it.

Tommy looks around at everyone speaking in loud voices, Wilbur and Fundy have joined Dream, Glitch and Sapnap. They're speaking very loudly, and Tommy is certainly not a fan of it.

Foolish doesn't appear to be either, because he's scowling slightly.

"Are they always like this?"

"First fifteen minutes is a catch up," Foolish explains, almost easily, he picks his book back up. "Fundy did also just get back from holiday, so he has a lot to talk about. Puffy, Phil and Quackity are probably talking about the mission. I have no idea where Sam is."

Tommy nods.

"So," Foolish says, "What do you do? What's your job, why are you here, all that good stuff."

"Public relations and social media for SBI," Tommy tries not to sound too tired when he says it. "Wilbur gets cancelled every second day. Hey, at least the pay is good."

Foolish laughs, and it sounds a bit like a window being cleaned, but hey, Tommy's laugh makes him sound like he's a middle-aged man who has breathing problems.

The door opens, and someone who Tommy recognises steps in.

Green hair, and a gas mask except it looks slightly modified. More compact.

(How could he not recognise him? Tubbo had ranted about the skill and the innovation that this man had provided the world. In fact, Tommy probably knew Vulcan's life better than he

did.)

It is Vuclan, the person who Tubbo looks up to probably the most in the world. Tommy stares for a moment, and it's almost funny. He's much taller than Tommy thought he would be.

"Sam," Puffy says brightly. "Glad you decided to show up."

Sam sighs, and takes off the mask, showing his face. Which startles Tommy, it's not like his face is public knowledge. It's like Dream, and so Tommy stares for a moment.

Foolish hits him in the arm, and Tommy stops staring.

"Sorry," Sam says, and his voice is a lot calmer than Tommy thought it would be. Deeper too. If this whole superheroing thing didn't work out, Sam could totally be a podcaster or something similar. "It was crazy in the lab. Fires." He sets his mask on the table, before his eyes scan around the room.

They land on Tommy. "Ah," Sam says, "You're Tommy. Nice to meet you."

He holds out his hand, for Tommy to shake. Which he does.

"Strong grip," Sam remarks. "I'm Sam. I've heard a lot about you."

Tommy lets go of Sam's hand and whirls around to look at Wilbur. "Wilbur you prick! I am going to have you cancelled on Twitter."

Wilbur looks fearful. "No, no, no," he laughs nervously. "Let's not go that far. I've already been cancelled enough in the past few weeks."

Which is true.

Tommy will be merciful this time.

He huffs and turns back around to face Sam, “I would say I hope that it’s only good things. But Wilbur is a prick and I hate him.”

“It wasn’t Wilbur,” Sam says calmly.

Tommy turns around, betrayed and looks at Phil. “Philza fucking Minecraft, what did you say to my idol?”

“How many idols do you have?”

“How many vigilantes can you kick off roofs?” Tommy snaps.

“Can, would, or have?” Wilbur responds, in the same tone.

The room is silent, and it’s almost funny how it’s gone from all the different energy, to this tense stare off between Wilbur and Tommy.

It is a very funny response, and Tommy would laugh at it if he was a weaker man. He is not a weaker man, so therefore keeps his face blank and just glares at Wilbur, trying to translate the fury behind his eyes into pure hatred.

Tommy takes a deep breath.

He could go for the low hanging fruit, but he’s not going to, because he’s that good of a man. Instead he needs to do this little thing called deescalating. And for someone who has lived

with Tubbo for years, he's not great at that.

Normally Ranboo does that.

Tommy glares a little harder, before spinning around and crossing his arms.

And like that, the tension has been broken slightly.

Tommy sighs dramatically. "Everyone ignore Wilbur. His real superpower is eating stir-fry with his hands."

And like that, the room erupts into chaos, several voices speaking at once.

"Ew. Wilbur"

"What the fuck?"

"I thought you went to a private school?"

"That's just concerning."

Tommy cackles, and he looks at Wilbur. Wilbur who is bright red and glaring at Tommy like he wishes death upon him.

Good. That's funny. Like really, just... fucking funny. Tommy laughs a bit harder, shaking his head slightly.

Phil sighs, “Okay, everyone’s here. Let’s get this meeting underway.”

Dream groans, but slides into his chair.

Tommy... stays where he’s sitting. Because he’s that simple, and he can not be bothered to find a new seat. Wilbur and Fundy sit across from him, Dream, George and Sapnap a little further up.

Puffy sits at the head of the table, Phil to her left and Sam to her right. Quackity sits in between Sam and Dream, and Tommy notices that Quackity seems to lean slightly closer to Sam than Dream.

Huh.

“Okay,” Puffy says, “Let’s cut to the chase. The new vigilante laws, and the fact none of us were contacted about the new amendment. I’m sure you all know.”

“The amendment was to suppress Theseus,” Dream snarls, but he doesn’t snarl the word *Theseus* he snarls the rest of the statement, and something about that calms Tommy down just a little bit.

Huh. Okay then. That’s good to know.

Fundy rolls his eyes, “As if. Theseus isn’t even that big of a threat...” he looks around at everyone. “Surely?”

“He’s powerful,” Puffy says, her voice is even, almost thought out, like every syllable is practised perfectly.

There’s something interesting about watching everyone else talking about him.

“We haven’t had a vigilante with this much power since Techno,” Puffy continues. “It makes sense why they want to regulate him, the same way they did with Techno. But... this amendment is huge.”

“This amendment appears to be to flush out Theseus,” Dream complains again, “Does no one see what bullshit that is? Look at how trying to get Techno to join the force went? Aren’t we learning anything from our past mistakes?”

“Hey, hey,” Quackity cuts in, “No one said anything about Theseus joining us,” he looks around almost frantically. “Right?”

“We are not having Theseus join us,” Sapnap adds, “We all know how trying to get vigilantes to work here goes, you have a loose canon like Techno. Look, I like Techno as much as the next guy but—”

“Those next words better be fucking positive, Sapnap.” That’s Wilbur.

Sapnap gulps. “But Techno doesn’t exactly listen to anyone, do we really need two of those on the team?”

“Maybe.” Foolish looks up from where he’s been looking at the table intensely. “Well... we don’t really know Theseus’s power set. He has some sort of energy manipulation, but do you guys know how powerful energy manipulation is?”

No one says anything.

Sam sighs, “Energy manipulation can be incredibly versatile. It’s a very broad powerset, similar to Techno’s healing. We don’t know whether it’s something more akin to other hybrid abilities, or something completely different.”

“Wait,” Quackity says, “Theseus is a hybrid?”

“We don’t think so,” That’s Puffy with her almost forced level voice. “We think he’s more... a descendant of one, which passed on the power but not the physical appearance. Kinda like you Quackity.”

Quackity nods and leans back into his seat.

“Fundy? Wilbur?” Sam says, “You’ve been awfully quiet. Especially you, Wilbur.”

Wilbur shrugs, “I don’t exactly want Theseus working with us. But I’d be an idiot to admit I’m not slightly interested in his powerset. I also believe that trusting Theseus with anything will get us stabbed in the back—”

Okay. Fucking ouch.

“But... I thought the same about Techno.” Wilbur sighs, “I guess I’m warming to him, he’s okay.” Then he winces and screws up his face. “Ew.”

“Wilbur admitting he tolerates a vigilante?” Quackity announces, “Someone check if Hell is frozen over.”

“Fuck off.” Wilbur mumbles.

Fundy sighs, effectively snapping all the attention back onto him, in a way that Tommy can envy slightly. It appears Fundy is a lot smarter than Tommy originally thought.

“I— dunno,” Fundy eventually decides. “I don’t think he’d ever want to work with us. I think the only way to get that to work was by similar methods to what they did to Techno. And... that didn’t exactly turn out great.”

George huffs with laughter and Fundy turns to look at him.

“Fundy, you weren’t even here when we brought Techno on. You don’t know half of it.”

Fundy flips him off. “We’ve gone off course anyway. We’re here to talk about the vigilante laws—”

“Not some dumb vigilante,” Sapnap finishes.

Dream groans, throwing his head back, he seems a bit tired of his friend. “Theseus is not dumb, he’s alluded all of us. Mainly Phil, Wilbur and Techno. The top fuckin’ five, that’s not easy.”

Wilbur’s scowl deepens.

“And the people actually *like* him,” Dream continues. “Do you know how hard that is to do? We have entire teams of people who have that job, and Theseus did that. If we keep underestimating him, we’re gonna keep getting our asses handed to us. These new laws aren’t gonna flush out Theseus, it just means that he could never come to us if he ever feels like that’s something he needs to do.”

Damn.

Everyone takes a moment to take all that in.

Tommy especially. Okay. Most of them don’t *like* vigilantes, but most of them apparently tolerate him. That’s so much better than what he was thinking. Even Wilbur is warming up to Theseus?

He can work with this.

Tommy realises that he has nothing to take notes with at that moment. Then panics. Then realise Henry is recording the entire thing, and he can just... yoink that off of Henry.

Cool.

He can actually work with this.

“Anyway—”

“What do you think?” Dream asks, his head is slightly tilted and his mouth is in a straight line. His eyes are covered with his mask, but Tommy has a feeling he knows the look behind them. “About Theseus? I mean you’re one of the people who have actually interacted with him.”

Phil’s face... it does something that Tommy doesn’t quite get. It gets almost sad.

Phil goes to open his mouth.

“That’s not what we’re talking about,” Tommy says, and he’s not quite sure why now is when he finally finds his voice. “We’re talking about what the fuck we’re going to do about the fact the government found this bigass loophole around us.”

Everyone stares at him.

And Tommy decides he has more to say.

“Look, we’re not going to be able to change the amendment. We just don’t have that power, what we need to do is to ensure this can and will never happen again. We need our own loopholes, we need our own plans.”

Fundy looks at him, eyes boring into him. “Where are you from, Tommy?”

Tommy gives him the same deadpan look. “I am not sure why this is relevant, Fundy.” He responds, he’s aware that his tone is defensive, but he doesn’t really care.

Fundy looks at him for a moment longer. “How long have you been in this job, Tommy?”

“Uhhh...”

“A month and a half,” Phil adds.

“Oh you don’t know shit!” Sarnap yells and laughs, “Tommy, Tommy, buddy, you’re young and naive — ”

And Tommy, for some reason, is not scared to throw down with these heroes. Wilbur and Phil won’t let anything happen to him here, not while he’s just Tommy. And he doesn’t care much if he loses his job.

He already has other job offers, he could just Tweet about it and get another job.

Tommy laughs, and it’s slightly bitter. “Okay *Sarnap*. That’s nice, but just because you’re bitter does not mean I am. There are loopholes, they exploited one, and we need to do that back. We can’t just sit down and let them use us as some sorta... fucking scapegoat. You really think this is the last time they’ll do this?”

The silence in the room is heavy.

“No. If I know one thing, about landlords, about people in power. Is that they find one loophole and exploit it. Then they keep pushing,” Tommy leans forward, “People in power will never really rest Sarnap, they will push and push and create more and more hoops to

jump through. We have to put our foot down now, rather than later. Because there won't be any later time."

Everyone stares at him.

Wilbur looks... proud.

Phil is also smiling, more subtly than Wilbur.

"And that!" Wilbur says, leaning back in his chair. "Is why I hired him."

Everyone looks at him, and Wilbur grins. Wilbur is still grinning at Tommy, "Good job kid. And that is why I fought Phil so much to get him hired."

"Wait, what?" Phil says.

Wilbur's smile gets a little bit brighter. "Look," Wilbur is still grinning uncontrollably. "Tommy is smarter than he lets on, and I was waiting for a—" he gestures at Tommy like that makes that make sense. "So, Tommy, what do you suggest we do?"

Tommy blinks at him for a moment, before taking a deep breath and actually thinking. "Well. We need a loophole, one that we can exploit and show that we are willing to stoop to that level, and we'll win."

He sighs, and looks around the room. Everyone is... actually listening to him, and that in itself is a weird feeling. It's a weird feeling because he isn't exactly used to being listened to, not by adults, and certainly not by people in positions of power.

But everyone is listening.

Tommy takes another deep breath.

“Okay. So the accounts you get paid into. Transfer all that into another account,” Tommy says, and he’s actually proud of this one. “In most of your contracts it states that if you decline a mission, they could drain that bank account. So, if you immediately start transferring your money into a personal account. That way the general public aren’t affected and it means that you’re gonna fight.”

Wilbur somehow grins wider, and it looks like his face could split in half.

And Tommy... he smiles too, because, fuck that is a good idea.

“And there we have it,” Wilbur looks at Dream, “Did any of your interns come up with that ___”

“Not an intern—”

“I think the fuck not,” Wilbur stands up and bows, the dramatic fucker.

Tommy gives him a look.

Wilbur flips him off.

Dream’s looking at Tommy, almost directly. Tommy shifts slightly. “Are you good there?” Tommy says.

He can’t see Dream’s eyes, and something about that makes him uneasy.

Tommy shifts again.

Dream shrugs and looks away.

Everyone looks at Puffy, and Puffy just gives a slight shrug. “You heard him, move your money out of that account, it doesn’t take too long and means that they have no power over us.”

“What if they stop paying us?” Foolish asks, “Not all of us can really... afford to stop being paid.”

Puffy gives him a look, “Only two people in this room can not afford to stop being paid, and both of those people are under the age of twenty.”

Purpled finally looks up from his spot in the corner of the room, he looks alert, and Tommy’s really struggling to figure out if he was sleeping or has been awake this whole time, and just listening.

“Huh?” Purpled says.

“Do you think the heroes could afford to stop being paid, just for a bit,” Tommy says.

Purpled nods, “Oh easily. I know most of these guys have bought their own houses and have a bunch of money saved in their accounts. The only one who might struggle is Fundy... but Wilbur or someone would cover for him—” Purpled yawns. “When is this meeting over?”

Quackity sighs. “Daniel, you don’t have to be here.”

“Nah,” Purpled waves a hand. “You need security.”

“You just fell asleep...” Foolish says, sounding legitimately confused, “And you’re a room filled with some of the most powerful people in the country.”

Purpled looks at him, expression flat. “I reckon Theseus could fuckin’ take all of you.”

Quackity winces, “Dan—”

Purpled looks at Tommy, then away, “What? He’s powerful, and could totally amass an army. He’s the people’s vigilante, he’s done all the PR work and honestly Tommy should get better at his job.”

Oh that shit.

“Yeah,” Tommy mutters, “Sorry. I’ll just try to be more like Theseus.”

Wilbur pulls a face.

Purpled snorts, and that in itself is hilarious. “Honestly, Tommy, be better.”

“Sorry *Daniel*. I shall simply just improve. Be right back,” he pushes away from the table. “Why does everything keep going to Theseus? He’s just some dude—”

“True.”

“Can’t we talk about—” Tommy pauses, and looks at Purpled, begging slightly with his eyes. Now is the perfect time for Purpled to save him, and Tommy will give Purpled... a new knife, if he does.

Purpled rolls his eyes, unseen by everyone else. “Those weird attacks,” Purpled says, and Tommy has never been more grateful. “First that one at the tower, then more around. They keep leaving... flowers?”

“We don’t know if the tower attempted attack was related,” Wilbur says, it sounds like he’s reading the words off a script. “It probably was, but we can’t confirm because no one has taken credit for it.”

“The last one was a poppy,” Quackity notes, “They projected a giant fuckin’ poppy on the wall. Wasn’t Theseus there?”

“Yeah,” Wilbur says, “Saw him afterwards, ran off before I could attempt to arrest him or anything.”

And Tommy... knows that’s a lie? He knows that Wilbur’s lying, because Wilbur woke him up and then told him to get home. While he was Theseus, and that is just... too much for Tommy to try and nitpick.

It doesn’t make sense. Why Wilbur would do that, and why Wilbur’s now lying about it. What reason does Wilbur have to lie? None. Absolutely jackshit.

Tommy finally sits back down, his head spinning with thoughts.

Why? Why would Wilbur wake up *Theseus*? That would’ve been the easiest arrest ever, only an insane person wouldn’t take it. Wilbur woke up Theseus, told him to leave and then didn’t follow him.

It. Doesn’t. Make. Sense.

And now he’s lying about it. Wilbur that is.

Now Purpled’s looking at Tommy.

Okay. This is fine.

“Poppies represent remembrance,” Dream says, “And hope for a peaceful future. But they were the first flowers to grow on the battlefields—”

“Why do you know that?” Tommy asks.

“But some interpret it as like... spirit and never giving up. Sacrifice, it’s a super like... symbolic flower because they grow most places so it varies from culture to culture but in most Western cultures it’s about it being a battlefield—”

“Why do you know that?” Tommy repeats.

“ADHD,” George deadpans, “When Dream was... eighteen he got super obsessed with victorian flower language and just flower symbology. What did Techno get super obsessed with?”

“Greek myths,” Wilbur deadpans, shuddering slightly. “I swear he’s called me Icarus or Odysseus or fucking whoever more than my actual name.”

“Yeah,” Dream finishes, “So... it can mean so many things.”

“Striped carnations?” Phil adds, “They were at the Logstedchire attack.”

“Uh,” Dream thinks for a moment. “That one’s normally like rejection. Like romantic situations, it’s almost an apologetic rejection.” Dream hums, “Maybe... the person is sorry about what they have planned? But that’s a stretch at best. Also regret, rejection and regret.”

Quackity sighs, “Well... that is not hopeful slightly.”

“It is,” Dream says, “Whoever is organising these know this, at least I assume. Not a whole bunch of people just know this—”

The door opens, and clatters as it hits the ground.

It’s Techno.

He sighs at the door that is now on the ground. “Stupid, fuckin’ doors,” Techno mutters. He picks up the door and leans it against the wall.

Everyone stares at him.

Techno gives an awkward, but polite smile. “Uh. Hello?”

And the room basically explodes.

“You said you wouldn’t be here.”

“Where have you been?”

“Aren’t you supposed to be on bedrest?”

Techno waves, and that somehow shuts everyone up. “Uh. Hello. I honestly didn’t think I’d show up today, and then I decided that I should probably explain some stuff, and wasting away in my apartment isn’t great for my mental health.”

He walks forwards.

Before sitting next to Tommy, Tommy shuffles a little bit away from him.

Techno looks at him, expression flat.

Tommy picks at the edge of the table, it hurts his nails slightly, but he'd rather that than look at the uncomfortable silence that has settled around the room. He manages to get a chip of wood into his palms, and debates stabbing it into his eye.

"How's the power mutation going?" Dream asks.

"Glad you asked," Techno says, standing up. "Henry, can you play that slide on the wall? Please?"

The lights dim, and an image darts onto the wall.

It's a slideshow, and Tommy wants to laugh about the absurdity of it all. Techno sighs and looks at all of them.

Techno's eyes land on Tommy, and it makes Tommy want to start screaming. Start running away and having a breakdown and sobbing into a ball. That's the ideal situation. Tommy keeps his cool.

It's difficult, but he can do this.

Techno claps his hands together and the slide changes.

A Short Guide to Hybrids: By Technoblade

Tommy stares for a moment, before looking at Purpled who also has wide eyes and seems to be a bit speechless. Everyone else seems interested in one way or another and that in itself was terrifying.

With a deep breath, Tommy tightens his grip on either side of his chair.

Techno sighs again, “Okay,” Techno says, “Hybrids are interesting. Because the official definition is people with powers and physical side effects for those powers. So Phil is a hybrid. He can fly, and he has wings, and he has a bunch of other stuff.”

Dream nods.

Tommy tries to calm his breathing down.

“But. The science reason behind that is a lot of fun,” Techno says, “So people like me and... Dream, probably both have hybrids somewhere in our bloodline. Now that’s interesting, because somewhere along the line there’s probably a hybrid.”

“Okay?” Sapnap says, “What does this have to do with anything? You’re powers are developing—”

“Oh, no they fucking are not,” Techno says and there’s something bitter there that Tommy doesn’t want to think about too much. “Let me finish. And hybrids are born, that’s something everyone accepts. They’re not made.”

“Well, fuckin’ duh,” Quackity says, “You can’t alter DNA.”

Techno sighs, “Yeah, you can. You really fucking can. So... I went to the hospital after making my bedroom look like a murder scene, and everyone thinks that it’s just late power development. I had a rocky upbringing, that makes sense.”

Phil nods slowly.

“So they took some bloodwork, just in case,” Techno says. “And... yeah so I’m kinda a hybrid now.”

The silence suffocates the room, everyone stares at Techno.

“That’s...” Phil starts, “Not how that works.”

“Argue with the blood work,” Techno says, and he’s refusing to make eye-contact with anyone. “Basically... yeah, slight problem for reasons I call obvious. Apparently it’s not possible, yet here I am.”

“What the fuck?” Dream says, standing up. “Look, great joke Techno, but stop shitting with us we have better things to do.”

Techno takes a deep breath, and he just looks more sad than anything. “Dream... I would love for this to be a joke, I would love to be able to turn around to all of you and say ‘got you’ but I can’t. I really can’t, and there’s nothing that I want more—”

“It’s a joke...” Dream says weakly, obviously trying to convince himself before anyone else.

Techno doesn’t say anything, and somehow that seems more like confirmation. Dream sits down, and his mouth is slightly open. Tommy can’t see the rest of Dream’s face, but he can feel the devastation.

“Yeah,” Techno looks down at his feet. “So basically, how that’s gonna work is. This one gene that was somewhere right back in my gene pool is like... mutating and taking over some of my other genes and stuff. Basically, it could progress forever.”

“What?” Phil whispers.

Techno doesn't look up, "So that means that it could keep progressing and progressing until I'm... not really a human, and I'm just... one of the things that they lock up in Pandora's vault because they're a danger to society."

And... holy fucking shit.

Tommy stares, mouth open. He is pretty sure everyone else is doing the same thing as well.

No one says anything, because... what are they supposed to say?

Techno sighs, "I suggest people who aren't registered as hybrids should be tested." He looks around the room, "I have some theories but I'm not completely sure what happened to me and it could be someone drugging us, better be safe than sorry."

"But why get tested?" Puffy asks confused "Wouldn't people know about being a hybrid from urges? Since they're usually the first and sometimes only sign."

"Good point." Techno says "But, I have a reason." he clicks away on his laptop, looking at the screen by the end of the table, now showing off a picture of a bloodied bed and floor "I don't want to happen to you," he points at the screen "What happened to me."

"What the fuck happened?" Wilbur asks, staring at Techno, horrified.

"According to the doctors my organs were changing to accommodate a new diet, lungs expanded a bit from what I know and my muscles were shaping themselves to be stronger and more durable." He pointedly avoids looking at Wilbur, focused on showing more pictures taken after the incident.

"From what I registered, this change begins from a weak point in the body, that part can be discussed, then it spread throughout the body and you start to get feverish, your muscles

spasm and then, blood, everywhere." he pauses, "This can be a problem with internal bleeding and such. Funnily enough, internal bleeding isn't amazing for your health. I can not think of why."

"What did you say?" Phil asks, arms crossed.

Techno looks surprised for a split second, but he recovers very well. "Pardon?"

"About it all. You're saying that the doctors said, you're speaking like you're telling us the news rather than pieces of your organs shifting around. While you were awake. We don't care about the literal definition mate, what about you?"

Techno's eyes land on Tommy for a split second, before looking back at Phil. "Well... it hurt. I thought I was going to die." Tommy nods in sympathy, gaining a weird look from Dream. "But... it's fine I suppose, there's a certain level where your body can't handle pain."

Wilbur winces, Quackity does too. Puffy looks unsure, Foolish looks suitably horrified. Dream... is wearing that fucking mask, who knows what he thinks.

Fundy just looks... incredibly sad, and it looks like George and Sapnap are in some state of shock, because they're sitting the stillest they have all meeting

"There. That's what I thought of it." Techno glares slightly at anyone. "Any more questions?"

Dream raises his hand slowly and Techno gives him a sharp look. "Yes?"

"What about the instincts," Dream says, voice flat. "Or how did this happen? Are we asking the right questions?"

"I think I know how," Techno responds, voice just as flat. "I have a couple theories, none of which concern you. My private life is that, private. Okay? Any more questions?"

Tommy raises his hand slowly, Techno's eyes soften and he nods. "Um." Tommy says, "Uh... does this mean your previous powers are gone?"

Techno claps his hands together. "See people! These are questions you should be asking. I don't know if my old powers still work, I have not tried."

Wilbur opens his mouth, then closes it again, as if he's not quite sure what he's thinking.

"In conclusion... uh. Yeah." Techno sits back down again.

"I don't think we should get tested for hybrids—" Wilbur blurts out.

"Wilbur—" Phil starts.

"Because, that would have to go on our records," Wilbur continues, "And people can find those if they snoop enough and that's not something that we want—"

And Tommy appears to be missing something here, but he's not quite sure what.

Wilbur pushes away from the table, shaking his head. "I'm sorry—" and he speeds out of the room and out into the hallway.

Tommy goes to stand up and go after him, to make sure that Wilbur's okay and to make sure that he's not going to do anything stupid.

Techno gives him a look.

Tommy sits down.

And his stomach drops in a way that he hates more than anything.

“So,” Dream says, breaking the silence. “You’re a hybrid. What type of hybrid?”

“Piglin,” Techno says weakly, “Apparently one of my grandparents was a piglin, so that’s where that comes from.”

“So,” Dream tilts his head, “Are you gonna get super obsessed with gold? Gonna try to put it in your mouth?”

“No,” Techno glares. “Not yet. I dunno, maybe.”

“Can you make the sounds?” Sapnap asks slowly, “The like... snorting noises, because that’s so cool.”

“No.”

“What about...” George adds, because the new game is to ask playful questions rather than accept the reality that is barrelling towards them. “I dunno, what else can piglins do?”

“They’re terrified of children,” Puffy adds and she’s smiling slightly.

“They don’t like the colour yellow,” Foolish adds, although he doesn’t quite sound sure about whether he should be speaking or not. “I had a friend who was a piglin hybrid, they like... once saw something yellow and started breathing all weird.”

“Good aim?” Purpled adds, “With like arrows and stuff, slightly hopeless with guns. But eh.”

No one says anything to that, and that makes Purpled roll his eyes and look away, and that in itself is hilarious.

Techno sighs, a very, very tired sigh. “What do you all know about—” he pauses, wincing slightly. “Kya-ukos.”

“Kyaokos?”

“No,” Phil says, screwing up his nose. “It’s spelt k-y-a-u-k-o-s.”

“Kyaukos.” Dream says, getting it right on the first time.

“Kyaohcos?” Sapnap says. Which isn’t even fucking close.

Tommy tries not to lose his fucking marbles, because... why, why call it by the scientific name

“Kyaukos.” Techno says again, this time only hesitating for a moment.

“Kya—”

"Blue—" Tommy cuts in, unable to help himself. "Please, please, please just call it blue."

Phil blinks at him, eyes concerned for a long moment. "Blue?"

"Street name," Tommy says, arms crossed and watching all the eyes of the heroes on him. He can feel Puffy's eyes digging into him, trying to figure something out. Anything, apparently.

"No one calls it whatever you do, can pick up a rich bitch in three seconds like that."

"How do you know what Blue is?" Quackity asks, slowly, unsurely, like he'll snap Tommy if he speaks too much. "Why—"

"Everyone in Logstedchire knows." Tommy shrugs, "Biggest problem there is Blue. Do you really think the rise of hybrids ain't related to the deaths by Blue overdose?"

He pauses. Okay... looks like they didn't know that. Tommy blinks at them all, brain short circuiting. That's just... something that everyone kinda knows.

Blue can make you a hybrid.

Kinda. It's complicated, but that's the long and short of it.

Every kid in Logstedchire was taught that before their own name.

And maybe that's why these guys can't guess what happened to Techno, because they don't know. Not like Tommy does, anyway. He's surprised Techno doesn't know.

"Oh." Tommy eventually says. He grabs his phone and does a quick little googling, it's very easy. And very easy to come up with the results

He grabbed it, bringing up the graph of Blue overdoses and the rising hybrid population. Before spinning it around to face the other side of the table.

"This is a case of causation, they teach it in schools."

"So..." Techno says, arms crossed and expression fierce. "What do you think happened to me?"

Tommy takes a deep breath, "You already had Blue in your system. Whether that was from breathing it in, or something else I don't know..."

He looks at Techno. "However they didn't know that, and so they used the other type of Blue which knocks you out quicker. So that caused mutations because don't mix drugs. And that's why you're a hybrid now."

And everyone blinks at him. Tommy blinks back.

"Yeah?"

"How— do you know that?" Puffy eventually pushes out. "Huh?"

Tommy shrugs. "Two types of Blue. To be a hybrid you gotta have the first type in ya system. Everyone knows that."

Phil looks sceptical, and Tommy does not need to deal with that.

He grabs his phone, and with zero hesitation calls Tubbo.

Tubbo picks up on two rings... he's supposed to be at school, there's muffled noise in the background. But not a lot.

"Tommy? Are you alive?" Tubbo asks, concerned. "Why are you calling me?"

"You're on speaker," Tommy says, "Heroes board meeting. Tell me what you know about Blue."

"Just the standard shit—" Tubbo pauses, regret in his voice. "Can I swear?"

"Yes, mate—" Phil says with a snort.

"Okay, two types of Blue. One is like... not that bad. Second one is way more addictive, but combined with the use of the other Blue you'll probably die."

Tommy gives everyone a look. "And is this a standard thing for you to know?"

"Yeah?" Tubbo says slowly, like it's a question. It's almost funny how uncertain he is. "We learnt it in health? I know you did online schooling but surely it wasn't that bad—"

"It was fine," Tommy cuts in, "I'll explain when I get home."

"What the fuck did you do—"

Tommy hangs up, before looking at everyone. He gives a small smile. "What? I'm unreliable. Tubbo expects the worst of me."

"Why?" Dream says cautiously, and if Tommy didn't know better, he'd say that Dream is slightly scared of him. "What did you do? To make him—"

"I blew something up once," Tommy says with an eye roll, it's a lie. Tubbo did that, but he is more than willing to run with this. "And then suddenly you can't trust me when I call you asking about random things."

Tommy can not see the face behind the mask, but he can almost see the slight horror. The look Ranboo has when Tubbo starts making plans, the look that Purpled has when Tommy is too far above his limit.

For someone who wears a mask, Dream is very fucking expressive.

Tommy grins widely.

“One time Wilbur called me,” Techno says, deadpan voice cutting through the silence that had become comfortable. “Asking me about how to clean out blood... I still have no clue why.”

“Was he bleeding?” Tommy deadpans.

“No clue,” Techno says.

There! There it is! First civil words to each other, Tommy and Techno. Boom. He’s a master of conversation, everyone should fear Tommy’s ability to speak to people.

“Does anyone know how to get blood out of the carpet?” Techno asks, trailing off slightly at the end.

And boom. Like that Techno has slaughtered the almost happy mood that formed in the room. Everyone goes quiet for a moment, realising why Techno is asking that, and Phil’s face goes all sad. Again.

Phil does not appear to be very happy.

And great, now Tommy’s sad.

“Yeah,” Tommy says slowly. “You like... one tablespoon of detergent with two cups of cold water. Then you like... get a sponge and sponge the stain until it goes away.”

Everyone stares at him.

“I think you’re all forgetting, I did not have healthcare until a month and a half ago. Of course I know how to— nevermind.”

It’s silent for a long moment, before Puffy stands up. “Meeting adjourned. Go off and live your lives.”

Some people rush to get out of there, it’s almost funny to see who’s desperate to leave and who’s going to stay for a moment longer. Sapnap, George and Foolish all rush out of there pretty quick.

After a moment of hesitation Quackity also stands up, as does Puffy.

Purpled gets onto his feet with a sigh, he glances at Tommy and there’s concern in his eyes. Which he masks after a moment, it’s almost impressive how quickly he does it. From being concerned to looking completely apathetic.

“Are you okay?” Purpled mouths.

Tommy shrugs.

Purpled leaves the room, trailing behind Quackity.

That leaves, Dream, Fundy, Phil, Sam, Techno and himself.

No one says anything for a long moment, Tommy would say it's almost uncomfortably quiet.

Sam is the first one to say anything, "I'm glad you feel better since you went to hospital."

Techno nods, it's a short and curt thing. Tommy supposes Sam and Techno aren't all that close. "Thanks, Sam," Techno says and leaves it at that, because it appears that Techno doesn't have more to say.

"Let me know if you need anything," Sam says.

And Tommy can see the way that Techno's face twists, it's so small, he's surprised that he even saw it. It's the look that Tubbo used to have when Tommy offered him anything, it's the look that screams *'do not pity me, I do not need your pity.'*

Techno shrugs a shoulder.

He looks at Fundy, "What do you want?" There's some bite there, but it's almost affectionate.

Fundy shrugs, "I don't really know, just wanted to make sure that you're okay."

"I'm fine, Fundy," and there's some tension there, that Tommy doesn't want to look into too much. "Could you check up on Wilbur for me?" Techno says slowly, debating every word. "Please?"

"Yeah," Fundy says softly, "I can do that."

He also leaves, and that leaves Dream. And Phil... but Phil was always going to be the last to speak. Tommy isn't going to say anything, he's smarter than that.

Dream hums. “So...”

“So...” Techno copies his tone, and there’s something funny about that. “It feels like you’re the ones who have received the bad news, rather than me. With how awkward you all are.”

Dream smiles, “I mean I didn’t come to work today, expecting to hear that your DNA is mutating so much inside of you that you might become more piglin than person, yet here I am.”

Techno also grins. “I did not sign up to be a hero to expect to hear that news, yet here I am ___”

“You signed up to be a hero because they would’ve put you in Pandora’s Vault if you didn’t,” Dream deadpans.

“Looks like either way I’m ending up in Pandora’s Vault—”

“Techno.” Phil cuts in with his Dad Tone™.

Techno rolls his eyes, “Geez, no dark humour allowed.”

“Make sure it’s lighter than the prison you’ll be put in,” Dream adds.

That makes the pair of them start laughing, almost uncontrollably. Phil looks a mix of disappointed and proud.

Something about them tearing the shit out of each other, and joking about it, seems to make the room lighter. It seems to get rid of some invisible weight off of Phil’s shoulders, and Techno looks the most relaxed he has the entire meeting.

Eventually Dream and Techno manage to gather themselves together, and Techno chuckles slightly.

“Right,” Techno says snorting.

“Honestly Techno,” Dream deadpans, “It’s like I don’t even know you anymore. You’re acting all... piglincy.”

“Ah yes, because the changes have really happened.”

“Yup. I can see tusks.”

Dream nods, he’s smiling slightly, “Well,” Dream says, “Don’t think you’re getting out of sparring. We gotta put that piglin strength to the test.”

Tommy looks down at his feet, his shoes aren’t all that interesting, but they are kinda dirty. He actually has work to do, he probably should go and do that. He has emails to answer, and more book deals to turn down because fucking everyone wants Techno to write a book, it’s a nightmare.

Can Techno even read?

Yeah, he can, but still. The point stands.

Maybe he should passive aggressively Tweet about it.

Tommy walks towards the door... well where the door was before Techno tore it off its hinges.

“Wait,” Techno says, and Tommy turns around. “I want to talk to you.”

And Tommy's heart drops.

Chapter End Notes



This time it's someone else's meme! Thank you to the lovely [Apollo](#), for making this meme. This is some of the fun and chaotic shit that you will see on the discord server.

Summary:

The new vigilante laws have not been approved by the power, this causes several conversations around it. Before they go to the hero meeting, there they discuss the

new laws, Theseus and what to do about the government finding loopholes. Tommy girlbosses, and Wilbur is a proud brother.

Techno rocks up, and then reveals a couple of things I would call significant. That he is now a hybrid and that is because of reasons. He reveals that he's a piglin hybrid, however the doctors do not know if the piglin DNA in his body will stop mutating.

So in theory Techno may become a "monster" or be unable to control himself, and become more animalistic. Like some people who are locked up in Pandora's Vault because they are "dangerous".

Everyone reacts to this, Techno says everyone should be tested if they're a hybrid. Wilbur can not cope and leaves. At the end of the chapter people give Techno their well wishes, Tommy goes to leave. But Techno wants to talk.

So... that was a chapter. If you think Techno is handling it well, think again. He is acting calm for the sake of his friends/family. Oh yeah, and the cliffhanger, is Techno gonna beat the shit outta Tommy? Yeet him off a building? That is for y'all to find out next chapter.

As always, [join the discord](#). Some of the highlights since last chapter include:

- debates about squashes vs. pumpkins
- a floof cult has been formed (for better or worse)
- twilight scared everyone with a [jacam](#) chapter 9 release date (i am so proud, do not

tell her i said that.)

- what some aliens would taste like

so if you haven't [join](#)! It's a lot of fun (people in the comments please vouch for me or I'll look so fucking stupid.)

That Time Techno Became A Tommy Apologist

Chapter Summary

Tommy "i am an adult" vs. Technoblade "you are a child".

Who will win?

Chapter Notes

Warnings: talks of abuse, violence, drugs and loss of a limb.

also techno goes up to a super high part of the building, and he's a little freaked out by heights.

be careful! there is a summary at the end too!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Techno was a child, he met this dog. He forgot it's name, but it lived in the alleyway by his crappy little apartment that was not worth the ground it stood on. He was fourteen when he first met it.

The dog was terrified of him, caution in every feature.

Techno isn't sure why he thinks of that dog he knew so long ago, when he looks at the way that Tommy almost completely freezes up. His shoulders tense and mouth slightly open. Tommy opens his mouth to say something, he closes it, then he eventually finds his voice.

"I have a lot of work to do," Tommy says. "I'm really busy—"

Dream is looking between the pair of them.

“I’ll be quick,” Techno says, keeping his voice steady.

Tommy gulps, taking a deep breath, and he shoves his hands into his pockets. Techno is almost sure they’re shaking, because Techno is doing the exact same thing. Even though he’s sitting down.

“Phil, Dream,” Techno says, his gaze still on Tommy. He looks over at Dream and Phil, trying not to make him uncomfortable. “I’ll talk to you both later, but could I talk to Tommy... alone?”

Dream nods and gives a two-finger salute, pulling the mask down so it’s covering his entire face. “You got it, don’t think you’re getting out of sparring.”

“I will literally break all your bones,” Techno deadpans, he’s not even joking. He doesn’t know what the fuck his powers can do, all he knows is that it probably won’t be very good for Dream.

“Still sparring,” Dream nods and walks out.

Phil sighs slightly, looking between Tommy and Techno. “Tech’s gonna be alright Tommy.”

Sometimes it pains Techno to know just how out of the loop Wilbur and Phil are.

“Yeah...” Tommy says almost absent-mindedly.

Phil gives Tommy a sympathetic smile and leaves the room.

So there’s no door, and Henry is still recording. Two things that he doesn’t really appreciate.

“Protocol 234.” Techno deadpans, and that stops Henry from recording in whatever room. Most people aren’t really aware of that, mostly because Techno added that code himself a couple days ago.

Tommy has put himself on the furthest side of the table, so that there’s almost a shield between the two of them. He’s also almost out the door, from a tactical move that is the smartest place to be.

From a human perspective, it’s slightly heart-breaking that Tommy is *this* scared of Techno.

Techno knows that Phil is probably back up on his floor by now, or looking for Wilbur if Fundy isn’t already doing that. This floor is just meeting rooms, and there aren’t any more meetings for two hours.

“So...” Techno says, “Twitter.”

“Huh?”

“You’re Theseus?”

Tommy stays silent but nods.

“And you’re having Twitter beef with yourself?”

“I— yeah.”

Techno almost laughs, it’s such a kid move. And makes something a bit more heartbreaking. Tommy is that, isn’t he? A kid.

“Now,” Techno says carefully, hoping Tommy won’t be running for the hills. “If you’re honest with me, I’ll be honest with you. Okay?”

Tommy nods, and takes a step towards the table. He grips onto it, and his knuckles turn white.

“Are you gonna kick me out a window or something—” Tommy eventually blurts out.

Techno looks at him for a long moment.

“I mean, that wouldn’t be ideal,” Tommy continues, “But like I don’t think I’d die, I think I’d catch myself. I’ve been a bit bad at that recently, but I think I’d be able to do it if my life depended on it.”

Techno pauses, “Tommy… I’m not going to do anything.”

Tommy bluescreens, and looks back at Techno. “Wait, what?”

“I’m not going to do anything?” Techno says slowly. “What would I do?”

“I dunno,” Tommy mutters, “Just punch me really hard. See if your healing powers still work but like reverse them, rip me apart—”

“No?” Techno says, slightly horrified, it’s in his voice, he knows that, he didn’t manage to stamp the fear out of it completely correctly. “I’m not going to— no?”

“Oh,” Tommy blinks. “Well that’s good.”

“What the fuck?” Techno says, shaking his head. “Why would I— what would that— huh?” He feels cold all over, like he was dunked in ice water. Why would Tommy even *think* that,

how terrified is he of Techno?

Tommy shrugs, “I’d figured you’d be mad over the whole hybrid thing— that’s kinda my fault. So.”

“Huh?”

“Well,” Tommy takes a deep breath and his knuckles whiten. “I kinda left you, and smashed the vials and you breathed in blue and I—”

“How old are you, Tommy?” Techno says carefully, trying to keep himself calm. “Don’t give me any of that nineteen crap.”

Tommy mumbles something down at his feet.

“Pardon?”

“Sixteen,” Tommy says slightly louder looking down at his feet.

Techno feels cold. Freezing fucking cold.

Tommy is *sixteen* ? That’s a literal child, a literal child. He might as well not know how to read— okay that’s a bit far, but still. Tommy is so, so, *young*. He’s so young, when Techno was sixteen... well he was training to be a hero.

But *training*. Tommy was out here being Theseus.

A sixteen-year-old has become a scape-goat for the heroes, and the government and why Logstedchire isn’t worth saving. Because Theseus (a sixteen-year-old) has it under control.

Techno opens his mouth, then closes it.

Sixteen.

Holy fuck. That's... too young, he's *so* young.

Tommy looks scared, and young. How the fuck did Techno not put it together before? Tommy is *sixteen* of course he's going to fuck up! The same way that all of them fuck up. And he doesn't have the support systems to negate the damage of a fuck up this big.

"You're so young."

Tommy looks surprised for a second, but manages to mask it. "I should've known better. I'm not a kid—"

"You are." Techno says, "You are a kid Tommy."

"I haven't been a kid in years," Tommy responds, and his tone is harsh.

Techno just looks at him.

It takes all of Techno's self control not to burst into tears.

"So, I'm sorry." Tommy says, his eyes are closed. "I fucked up. Like majorly. I think... when whoever that was got their hands on you, they stabbed you with the second type of Blue. And you breathed in the first type when I smashed those vials. I'm really sorry and I get if you hate me or—"

Techno cuts in before he can help himself. “I don’t.” Techno whispers, but it seems to cut Tommy off pretty effectively. “I don’t hate you Tommy.”

“Huh?”

Techno struggles to find the right words, there aren’t really words. “I don’t hate you.” He repeats because that is a world easier than trying to explain himself. “I really, don’t hate you.”

“Why?” Tommy whispers, and he bursts into tears.

Neither of them move, Tommy tilts his head down at his shoes and makes small noises that hurt Techno’s heart.

“Just hate me,” Tommy says through tears. “That’s easier.”

“Maybe it is,” Techno responds, “Tommy, I’m not gonna hate you. You’re a kid. I’m not gonna hate you, you’re too good of a person to hate.”

Tommy sobs, and that in itself hurts Techno’s heart, just a little more. It’s not a pretty sight, to watch Tommy sob. Tears stream down his face, and Tommy takes a deep shaky breath, before making another broken noise.

“Please,” Tommy says, “Just hate me, when Wilbur and Phil find out— you’re not gonna—” Tommy chokes on a sob, “Leave them, so please just make this easier for yourself.”

“I’m not going to do that Tommy.”

“Why not?” Tommy yells, there’s a spark that flies out of his hand and Techno watches it fall to the ground.

Well shit. That is not something that he needs right now, he does not need Tommy blowing something up. That is less than ideal.

“Please!” Tommy yells.

“I’m not going to hate you, Tommy.”

“I’m dangerous!” Tommy yells, “Surely you’ve heard it, I’m dangerous, and no one can trust me and I do more damage than I do good—”

Techno is thrown back, hitting the wall with a thump. He winces, it barely hurts, it just shocks him more than anything.

Sparks are flying out of Tommy’s hands, he’s still crying, tears streaming down his face.

Techno’s thought is how anyone can be scared of this kid.

“Shit, shit, shit,” Tommy mutters, taking a step back. “Tech, I’m sorry, I’m sorry— I didn’t mean to. I’m sorry.”

“Tommy,” Techno takes a step forwards, both hands up. “It’s fine. I’m fine. It didn’t hurt, it’s fine. Once I broke Wilbur’s arm because he scared me, that’s nothing. Tommy, it’s fine.”

“What if I hurt someone?” Tommy yells, “I can’t control it, I can’t— I can’t.” Tommy leans against the wall, and slides down it.

Techno walks around the table separating them, and Tommy is sitting on the ground, head buried between his knees. His shoulders are shaking, and he’s making small noises that aren’t too dissimilar to wimping.

And Techno... is so far out of his comfort zone. He doesn't... really know what to do.

He tries to think of what he would want, if he was Tommy.

Probably a hug.

And someone to be there, to sit by him despite everything. So Techno sighs, and sits down next to Tommy. There's still some gap between the pair of them.

Tommy keeps crying, and Techno doesn't say anything.

It's quiet, apart from the occasional sobbing noise from Tommy. "I hate you," Tommy says and doesn't mean it in any sense of the word. Techno knows that, Tommy knows that, if a random stranger was there, they'd know that.

"You're a fucking idiot," Tommy continues, "And I'm gonna hurt you again, because I'm good at that and then you'll realise that I'm not good for anything and that I'm tricking you into thinking I'm a good person—"

"Don't give yourself that much credit, kid," Techno says, smiling slightly. "You're not that good of an actor."

Tommy looks at him, wiping his tears. "I am having a crisis, and you say that?"

"Yeah." Techno sighs, laughing slightly. "When I was having a crisis Floof just sat there. I am channeling my inner Floof."

"Gonna scare Quackity?"

“Maybe.”

Tommy sniffs again, and bursts into another round of tears. Techno sits there. He doesn't say anything, because saying anything seems too difficult, too much for Techno to be able to handle.

So they both sit there, in silence, apart from Tommy's sniffles.

“When I was ten,” Techno starts. “I lost my leg.”

“Huh?” Tommy whispers.

Techno pauses, looking at Tommy. “You... don't know?”

“Know what?”

“I have... a prosthetic leg?” Techno says slowly.

“Oh.” Tommy blinks at him, “I— did not know that.”

“It's not a secret?”

“I mean—” Tommy shrugs, “The public doesn't know.”

“That doesn't make it a secret?” Techno says and Tommy looks slightly guilty. “I already get shit on for being an ex-vigilante, do not need whatever other prejudices people have on top of that— where was I?”

“I think you were about to spill your tragic backstory?”

“Ah.” Techno nods slightly, before taking a deep breath. For a moment he struggles to order his thoughts. “Yeah. So lost my leg when I was ten, some accident, kinda blocked it out—”

“This is the most anti-climatic tragic backstory I have ever heard,” Tommy deadpans, “Where’s the *drama*, where’s the *pizazz*? Where is the traumatising everyone through your experiences?”

Techno gives him a flat look. “You’re rating my trauma?”

“No, I’m rating the way you tell it,” Tommy turns so he’s facing Techno. “But by all means, continue.”

“Who hurt you?”

“My parents.” Tommy deadpans, “That is part of the problem—”

“No, no, no,” Techno cuts in, “My tragic backstory time. You can have your time in a moment. I am going to tell you this, if it kills me.”

“Will it?”

“What? No!”

“Cool,” Tommy moves so his elbow is on his knee, and he’s propping his head up with his hand. He looks like a toddler. Or a condescending adult. “Keep on going. You lost your leg, can’t remember it—”

Okay. Tommy is absolutely terrifying, and needs a bucket load of therapy apparently.

“Well...” Techno takes a deep breath, trying to steady himself. “So I was in the fighting rings when I was younger— that’s not a secret but— wow, that’s a relief to say out loud.”

Tommy nods, and that’s all the encouragement that Techno needs.

“Yeah. So that wasn’t a great time in my life, left me with a bunch of issues... and when you... left me, if only for a moment. That brought up—” he waves his hand.

That brought up nightmares, and panic attacks— and multiple messes of nights that he couldn’t sleep and—

He waves his hand. “A lot,” he decides. “It brought up a lot of nightmares, and that fucked me up for a while. But, I think I’m better. For now,” Techno looks up at the roof, “I’ve been getting better.”

“That’s... good.” Tommy says weakly.

Techno sighs slightly. “What do you know about the fighting rings?”

“Uh,” Tommy looks like he’s thinking. “Normally they’re hybrids. And the conditions are dodgy at best. Horrific at worst, and that it’s like a whole community. And people lend the fighters to each other.”

Techno looks at Tommy. He knows more than the average person. Like easily, most people don’t know about the whole trading system. He looks at Tommy for a moment longer, figuring out how to voice his thoughts.

“You’re a fighter?” Techno asks.

Tommy shakes his head, “No, no, not me. People I know.”

“Oh. Okay.”

“Were you moved around a lot?” Tommy asks.

Techno nods, “Yeah. Was one of the star-fighters, I guess that’s what you’d call me. Was famous enough that the heroes knew about me. I stopped fighting for a bit—” Techno shudders.

Cold metal, seeping into his back. Metal. Metal. It’s all metal

He takes a deep breath. He’s fine. This is fine.

“And... it’s weird to explain. I have this thing I call Chat.”

“Oh?”

“Basically... it’s voices. I used to hear them all the time, but they’ve calmed down since then. The doctors think that when I have enough adrenaline it activates. Super weird but... I dunno.”

“Oh.” Tommy says.

Techno gives him a look. “My tragic backstory has you saying ‘oh’?”

“Not that tragic,” Tommy deadpans, but he’s smiling slightly and he knows that he’s joking. “I mean, where’s watching your parents dying?”

“Sorry, sorry,” Techno shakes his head. “I’ll just go find them real quick.”

“Honestly,” Tommy snarks, “You say you need therapy? You haven’t even seen your parents die.”

Techno nods, before laughing and shaking his head. “So how tragic is your backstory?”

Tommy hums, “Uh... pretty.”

“Descriptive.”

“Right?”

Tommy leans back against the wall, sighing slightly. “I’m not telling you. That’s my business and my business alone.”

“Does anyone know?” Techno asks, “You don’t need to talk to me about it, but it’s good if... someone knows.”

“No one knows.” Tommy says, eyes staring blankly ahead. “And I’m keeping it that way, I don’t need people prying around in my past that doesn’t even matter.”

Techno gives him a look.

Tommy keeps looking forward.

“So,” Techno says, “We should probably talk about that vigilante thing.”

Tommy freezes slightly, and he looks at Techno.

His eyes are wide, and he shuffles away slightly, he shakes his head a little bit more. “No, no, no— I think it’s fine if we don’t!”

“I’m trying to be a responsible adult,” Techno deadpans, “I’m not going to do anything Tommy— we’re having a conversation. I’m not going to yell, or hurt you.”

Tommy laughs, “Heard that one before.”

Okay. He doesn’t have enough time to unpack that.

He hates how the dots connect in his head that quickly, between the comment about Tommy’s parents and the entire... thing about Tommy. He’s almost sure somewhere in his past there’s abuse.

And... something about that does not sit right with Techno. While that isn’t a shock as such it’s still... scary.

“Okay,” Techno keeps his voice level. “I am going to talk to you. You can keep the distance between us, but I’m not going to do anything.”

Tommy glares. “I’m not fucking scared of you!”

It’s slightly too loud, and slightly too desperate.

“I know,” Techno lies, he turns so he’s looking right at Tommy. They’re both facing each other, two metres or so between them. Tommy moves back, and makes that distance even bigger.

The gap is slightly big enough that Techno can't make it to Tommy in one movement. From a tactical standpoint, that's skilled and a smart move. From a human standpoint, it's almost more than heartbreaking.

He's so young.

"I'm not going to report you," Techno starts with. "Okay? The only circumstances I would have, is if I legitimately think you're a risk to others. And I don't believe that you want to hurt others."

Tommy nods, he's shaking slightly.

"Okay?" Techno says.

"Where's the catch?" Tommy asks slowly.

And Techno isn't going to lie to Tommy, he's too tired for lying. "Because I feel better about that."

Tommy nods shakily, he doesn't seem as scared anymore. He just seems... unsure about the entire situation. And Techno can't blame him for that, for some reason Tommy thinks everything is his fault.

If someone stubbed their toe, Tommy would find a way to convince himself that was his fault.

"It's not your fault," Techno says. Tommy looks directly at him. "You didn't inject me with the second type of Blue."

“But I handed you over—”

“And you didn’t know,” Techno keeps his voice level. Because one of them has to, and it looks like Techno’s being an adult. “If I remember correctly, you had a knife in your stomach? And wanted to go home. Tommy, you’re a *child* .”

“But—”

“Nothing,” Techno says, “Okay? I don’t expect you to make good choices when you’re a child. Fuck knows I was making some interesting ones. I tried to kill a government official when I was your age.”

Tommy just looks at him.

“Look. I’m not mad at you anymore.”

“But you were.”

“Mhmm,” Techno nods, “I was very mad.”

“Okay.”

“But I thought about it,” Techno continues, “And... it’s okay. You’re just a human, you’re not some Greek hero. We’re all just humans, and we all fail. And it’s nice for everyone else to remember that.”

Techno takes a deep breath. Rather now than never.

"Do not get caught."

"Huh?"

"Whatever you do, Tommy, do not get caught," Techno says, bringing his eyes to Tommy's. "Kick and scream and fight. Do not let them arrest you. You'll be given two options, one, Pandora's Vault for you and your friends. Two, becoming a hero. Do not become a hero. Whatever you do."

"I'm going to fight for you with everything I have," Techno says and that's a promise and a half.

"You wish someone fought for you," Tommy says, it isn't a question.

"Yes." Techno takes a deep breath, "I guess I do. I guess you're a bit like me."

"You remind me painfully of myself," Techno laughs and it's sad, even he can hear it. "Don't let them get you. You're too good for this."

"I'm supposed to be better," Tommy mumbles.

"You are. You're the best of us, Tommy."

"I am some kid, who doesn't know what he's doing—"

"You're a kid who's using an ability to help others. Despite it being illegal, despite co-workers hurting you. Despite every reason to quit, and you haven't."

Tommy looks at him, eyes wide. He looks... so young, and slightly terrified. "You mean that?"

Techno pauses and thinks about it.

He doesn't just want to stay stuff and not mean it, but he's been picking that up from Wilbur. He thinks. Tommy, who has been very hurt by Wilbur, continues to laugh with him. Tommy who has every reason to give up on the world and doesn't.

Tommy who's just a kid who wanted to do the right thing.

"Yeah," Techno says quietly. "I mean that."

And Tommy bursts into tears.

Something he appears to do quite a lot, all the tears build up and release at once. Which is why Tommy is crying so hard right now.

"It's okay," Techno says.

"Can I—" Tommy hiccups, and wipes at his eyes frantically, but they're making tears quicker than he can wipe them. "Please... you said—" he breaks off into a sob and curls over himself.

"What did I say, Tommy?" Techno asks.

Tommy looks up, tears streaking down his face. Generally looking like a mess. A terrified mess.

"That if I wanted, I could ask you for a hug—"

And *oh*.

That's... a lot.

“And—” Tommy continues through tears, “You’d give me a hug.”

“Yeah. I did say that.”

“Do you still mean it?” Tommy asks, his voice is small.

Techno nods.

“Can I have a hug?”

Techno holds his arms out, and Tommy basically launches himself into Techno’s arms.

He wraps his arms around Tommy’s shoulders and hugs him tightly.

Tommy cries even harder.

Techno just hugs him, because what else can he do? No words will make this better, he’s not going to pretend that Tommy is so starved of people telling him that he’s a good person, that the first time someone does, he bursts into tears.

Tommy deserves better.

“I’m so sick of being scared!” Tommy sobs into Techno’s shoulder.

“I know, I know,” Techno says, hugging Tommy a bit tighter. “Me too.”

“I just want to be normal.”

And yeah. Techno knows that feeling, sometimes he’s convinced he’s the only person who knows what that’s like. But he’s not. Everyone wants to be ‘normal’.

“I know,” Techno says, hugging Tommy tighter than he thought possible. “I know. Trust me kid. I know.”

Tommy cries a little bit harder, and Techno hugs him a bit harder.

Eventually Tommy lets Techno go, pushing away. He rubs his eyes.

“I have been crying so much. Over fuckin’ everything.”

Techno nods, because what else is he supposed to do?

Tommy takes a deep breath, rubbing at his eyes, “Thank you,” Tommy whispers. “Just... yeah.”

“You deserve to be forgiven.”

Tommy sits up a little straighter, and he nods his head. “You know what. Yeah. I do. Bitch.”

Techno laughs, shaking his head slightly. “Okay, Tommy.”

“Yeah!” Tommy exclaims. “I’m so much cooler than you.”

“Wow, you’re really being an asshole,” Techno says, he’s smiling slightly and Tommy is too.

Tommy breaks into a grin. “Yup!”

He stands up, and Techno looks at him.

“Okay. Now my breakdown is over.”

“That’s not how that works slightly—”

Tommy stands up, and walks towards the door. He pauses at the door and turns back around to look at Techno. He doesn’t look scared as such, he looks... apprehensive? Unsure? Techno doesn’t quite have the words for it.

“You okay?” Techno asks.

"I hope what happened to you was a one time thing..." Tommy trails off, and Techno doesn’t really know what he’s expected to imply from that.

“I hope so too.. I don't plan on throwing up on the floor again, I already don't do well with vomit, I almost faint just at the mention of it, straight up blood is just too much.” He’s exaggerating a little bit, but not that much.

“But— you—” Tommy stumbles over his words for a moment, before shaking his head. “The — the chicken. You know. When I was sick?”

“When you threw up?”

Tommy nods.

And... yeah... Techno did not enjoy any part about that day. It wasn't great. "Eh," Techno shrugs, "I didn't mind."

"Oh." Tommy says weakly, "I'm gonna go and—" he vaguely gestures over his shoulder, and walks out.

And... Techno's okay with how that went.

He thinks that they're going to be alright. Maybe not straight away, but eventually. They'll be okay.

Standing up, his bones pop slightly.

"Reverse protocol 234," Techno says with a sigh, he cracks his knuckles.

Right.

No rest for the wicked, time to find Fundy.

"Henry, can you call Fundy up?"

"Sure thing," Henry responds.

There's a beeping noise.

Techno's phone rings.

It's Fundy calling him.

Okay then.

Techno grabs his phone out of his pocket. He laughs at Fundy's contact picture, it's a photo of him when he was younger. (Seventeen?) And he's looking deadpan into the camera, while covered in slime.

It's funny.

And Techno still has no clue why Fundy was slimed.

He accepts the call and holds it up to his ear, "Fundy."

"Techno, hi, hello." Fundy says, he sounds a bit breathless. "Good news, or bad news?"

"Uh. Good?"

"Okay," Fundy says, "Good news. Wilbur is coping okayish, probably better than we both expected. Bad news, he's staring out the windows on... top floor? On the sky deck? And that is not great for his mental health—"

"Oh shit," Techno basically runs out of the door. "Is he like... crying?"

"He wasn't when I left."

“You left him?”

“Not all of us have a bunch of sick leave they can use whenever shit happens, some of us are still on the bottom of the payroll.”

“You still make a lot of money!”

“Okay, you make easily triple what I do—”

“We are not arguing about this now,” Techno sighs, tucking his phone between his ear and shoulder.

He steps into an elevator and chooses the sky deck.

“Okay,” Fundy sighs. “But I had stuff to do. I think he’s okay. He didn’t really tell me anything, but I can guess.”

“Right, right, right,” Techno says, the elevators whirls around him. “Okay. So. What’s the go from here, what approach should I take?”

“Honesty.” Fundy says, “Give me a moment.”

There’s muffled yelling on the other end. “Can you not?” Fundy yells, which is slightly muffled and further away.

Where the fuck is Fundy?

“Some of us are dealing with a minor crisis on our hands. Shut up!” Fundy sighs and moves the phone back closer. “Sorry, just be honest with him. If it’s not alright— *shut the fuck up!* Then tell him that it’s not alright.”

“Cool,” Techno sighs and the elevator pauses for a panic-filling moment. “Thank you, Fundy. You’re an okay nephew-thing.”

“Wilbur is not my father.”

“We both know you see him as a parental figure.”

“He’s like three years older than me,” Fundy groans, “I don’t see him as a father figure.”

“Sure,” Techno draws. “What about that time you called him Dad?”

“THAT WAS AN ACCIDENT!”

Techno just chuckles, “Sure, sure.”

“I could have this argument about you and Phil,” Fundy grumbles. “Wilbur isn’t my dad, I have my own parents.”

“I thought you were an orphan?”

“Okay! Goodbye!” Fundy says and hangs up.

Techno laughs, and shakes his head slightly.

Ah. Fundy.

One of Techno's favourite orphans. He's on that list, along with Tommy.

The elevator dings, and the doors slide open.

The sky deck terrifies most people in the tower. Which is probably fair enough, it's one of the top floors. It oversees most of the city, and you can pretty easily see out into the suburbs and the more farming areas if you try hard enough.

Only Phil and Wilbur enjoy being up here. Apparently it's good for sparring, because the glass on this floor *will not break*. And by that, Techno means once he was thrown against the window and it just threw him back onto the floor.

Something about kinetic energy, was how Sam explained it.

Still, Techno doesn't really enjoy being up here.

Windows on all sides, it was a bit freaky.

Wilbur is sitting against one of the windows, but in such a way that he can look out of the one next to him. His shoulder against the window, and he's looking longingly out the window. And Techno doesn't need to imagine what he's thinking. He's like Phil in that way, wanting to fly.

"Hey," Techno says, because what else is there to say?

Wilbur looks up at him, and rolls his eyes slightly. "You sent Fundy to check up on me."

"I did. I had to talk with Tommy."

And that makes something on Wilbur's face shift, "How's he taking the news?"

"Better than you," Techno says slowly, thinking about it. "He feels guilty, never seen someone with a hero complex like him." He sits down next to Wilbur, crossing his legs. "He makes Phil look tame."

"Atlas," Wilbur adds, almost absent-mindedly. "You used to call me that. It seems to fit Tommy more."

"Yeah," Techno nods, he also looks out the window. He's never really liked heights that much, but he can appreciate the sky. Techno always liked it more underground, for a reason he couldn't quite grasp. He supposes it's the piglin blood that's barely hidden. "How are you?"

"Scared." Wilbur confesses, with closed eyes and a shaky voice. "And angry."

"Me too," Techno also confesses. It's just Wilbur, Wilbur has never judged him before, and he's not going to start now. "I am fucking terrified."

"I'm sorry— I'm supposed to protect you."

"Wilbur, we're not teenagers anymore. I can fend for myself. Well— most of the time I can."

Wilbur sighs again, moving so he's leaning against Techno. "Yeah, but you're my little brother. I'm the oldest, I gotta protect you."

"I'm the same age as you."

Wilbur rolls his eyes, "You're my little brother. That's all there is to that, and I didn't look after you as well as I should've and I am sorry for that."

Techno rolls his eyes at that, stupid fucking hero of a brother. Blaming everything on himself. Techno just shakes his head and sighs, because what else should he do?

"So... what didn't you tell everyone? And don't tell me nothing, I could see you lying."

Techno sighs, again, it appears he's doing that a lot. "That... I don't want them to look at me like I need help. I don't. I'm still Techno, barely anything has happened yet. My teeth are sharper and my ears are slightly pointier."

"Is that all?" Wilbur asks, and they both know it isn't.

Sometimes Techno hates how well Wilbur knows him. That he's lying and hiding the truth. Part of him hates how known he is, the other part of him knows that people knowing him is what love is. And that he's loved.

"No." Techno takes a deep breath. "They think they can do something... to fix it, to stop the DNA from replicating. It's a lot of money and—"

"We can pay."

"It could kill me," Techno eventually says, and Wilbur's mouth falls open. "They're fucking around with my DNA. That could kill me."

Wilbur sighs, a very, very tired sigh. "I'm so confused. I don't know what's happening anymore. Everything seems to just rush by, and... it never slows down. All the attacks, with the weird fucking flowers. Tommy. Theseus. Everything it's... so much, all the time."

Techno nods, because he understands it. He really does, he understands it painfully well, and he hates that. "Thanks." He says instead.

Wilbur looks at him, expectantly, confused, Techno doesn't have the right words for it.

"For being my friend, for being my brother... and for being here."

Wilbur leans into him slightly more, and Techno can't blame him.

"You did the same for me," Wilbur says, his voice quiet. They don't talk about this a lot, Wilbur doesn't remember a lot from it. Techno can't forget it. It's an interesting mix. "I don't remember much from after, but I remember you. That you were like an angel protecting me, and I guess it's my turn to return the favour."

Techno huffs, "I'd do it again."

"I know."

"With no hesitation."

"I know, Techno," Wilbur continues, his voice soft and fond. The tone that Wilbur reserves for family alone, no one else gets the gentle tone. Just family. "Thank you. For being there."

"This sounds like a goodbye, Wilbur."

"Nah," Wilbur says, and he's smiling. "Can't get rid of me that easily."

"Good," Techno remarks, and reaches an arm around Wilbur's shoulders, something that he doesn't seem to mind because Wilbur relaxes slightly more. "You're stuck with me."

Wilbur huffs slightly, “It isn’t fair.”

“No. It’s not.”

“Can’t life be fair to us?”

“No,” Techno sighs.

“Can’t have shit in L’Manberg,” Wilbur mutters. Techno laughs at that. Wilbur closes his eyes, still leaning against Techno. “I’m really tired, Tech.”

“I know,” Techno all but whispers, “Get some rest.”

“I don’t like sleeping.”

“I know. But you like being tired less.”

Wilbur huffs, and closes his eyes.

Techno does the same thing, leaning against the window that won’t break no matter how much he tries. Wilbur is leaning against his shoulder, eyes closed and breathing steadily. Techno relaxes at that slightly.

Wilbur’s breathing evens out, and Techno decides that *maybe, maybe*. He can also get some rest, so he relaxes.

And for the first time in forever he gets some good rest.

A few hours later, Techno manages to get home.

He manages to sneak around Phil, and not have to speak about his entire situation again. He does almost drop something on Tommy's foot, and Tommy does not look impressed.

Still, he got home.

"How'd it go?" Niki asks softly.

She's leaning against the wall, arms crossed, concern on her face as Floof runs around her legs excitedly. Floof really has decided to be as cute as possible at this moment, as he's chasing his tail in a wide circle around Niki.

It is very endearing.

"Okay," Techno puts his bag down on the counter. "Wilbur's going to pretend he's handling it well. I avoided talking to Phil for another day. Tommy is taking it... interestingly."

"Tommy?" Niki asks, confusion on her face.

"Oh," Techno blinks, "PR manager. He's pretty young—"

He's sixteen.

"And we're fairly close," Techno shrugs, he hauls his bag back over his shoulder before stumbling into his bedroom. He throws the bag in there and turns back around so he's facing Niki.

"You shouldn't be avoiding Phil," Niki says with a concerned expression. "He cares about you, and he's going to be accommodating."

“I don’t need therapying,” Techno huffs, he sits down on the couch and puts his legs up on the rest of the couch. “I know I should talk to Phil it’s just—”

“It’s difficult.”

“Yeah…” Techno mutters, “Like— yeah.”

“You care about his opinion,” Niki explains, sitting down on the ground across from him. She crosses her legs, and Floof manages to clamber in her lap. “And— I’m guessing that you find it difficult to lie to Phil.”

“Yeah.”

“So,” Niki gives Techno a look. “What does that mean?”

“Uh… that I need to stop being a coward?”

“No,” Niki says, “Go back to therapy.”

“Niki,” Techno draws out the word, throwing his head back. “I don’t wanna go back to therapy, “I worked so hard.”

Niki gives him a look.

Techno rolls his eyes, “Wilbur doesn’t go to therapy,” he grumbles.

“I have heard you rant about how Wilbur needs to go to therapy,” Niki says, her tone caring, but a little flat. Like they’ve had this conversation a thousand times. And... they kinda have. Let’s just say, Wilbur comes up in conversation a lot. “And you’re not Wilbur, you both have your own issues that you need to work through.”

Techno sighs, leaning more against his couch and looking up at the roof. “Niki... I don’t wanna.”

“Techno.”

“Niki.”

“For Floof,” Niki says, she smiles and holds Floof.

It’s a bit like Rafiki holding Simba at the start of The Lion King.

Floof hangs there awkwardly, and looks a little bit offended about the entire thing. He looks at Techno, expression flat.

Niki smiles. “See! Floof thinks you should go back to therapy.”

“Floof— I love you, and because of that. I will say that you are wrong.”

Floof just looks at him.

Niki settles Floof back down, and he decides that he’s not a fan of Niki at the moment. He leaps up onto the couch and lands on Techno’s stomach, Techno makes a noise, but Floof decides he doesn’t care.

He curls up into a ball.

Looks like Techno lives there now.

“I got better,” Techno says, “I’m sick of therapy.”

“Healing isn’t linear.”

Techno sighs.

They stay silent for a moment, Niki picks at the carpet on the floor, and Techno is very, very carefully running his hands through Floof’s fur. Part of him is slightly scared of what will happen, he could hurt Floof.

He can’t really... control his strength.

But he trusts himself with Floof, he’d rather go through his organs shifting again than hurt Floof.

Floof is asleep, and peaceful.

Techno could fall asleep right now.

“What do you know about flower symbology and Victorian Flower language?”

Niki laughs, “Where does this come from?”

“Weren’t you a florist?” Techno says slowly. “For like a couple months.”

“No florists know flower language,” Niki snorts, “People know the general vibes. Most of my job was cleaning anyway, and getting rid of the spikes off of roses. No one really knows flower symbology.”

“Really?”

“The nerds do,” Niki adds, laughing slightly, “I wasn’t there long enough to learn. I do remember weddings were nightmares,” she shakes her head and shudders at the memory. “I hate weddings.”

“Haven’t been to one,” Techno mutters, mostly into the air.

“Really?”

“Nah. Who’s? I don’t know anyone who is married.”

“Phil?”

Techno laughs, throwing his head back. “Please.”

“What? He’s... older.”

“Phil is not married!”

“Not once?”

“No!” Techno laughs, trying to be careful not to wake Floof up with how hard he’s laughing. “Phil has been single for... ever. Why are we discussing Phil’s love life? Ew.”

Niki laughs, “That is a bit weird.”

“Ew.” Techno screws up his nose, “Ew, he actually has a love life now. Can you pass me my phone?”

Niki passes his phone over.

Techno grabs it and opens it. He has a couple of texts from different people. Some from Wilbur, those are just all memes. A couple from Dream, and a couple more from Fundy. He also has a couple from Phil.

None of them are pressing though, so he ignores them all.

“So,” Niki says, looking at Techno. “What comes next?”

Techno sighs, closing his eyes slightly. “I have some loose ends to tie up, I suppose. And some people I need to track down and talk to.”

“Oh?”

“From my past,” Techno says quietly, still looking up at the roof.

He doesn’t see Niki’s reaction, but he can imagine it, slightly concerned.

“City Hall,” Niki starts, and that manages to shock Techno into looking over at her. “They have records there... if you need to find people, that’s the best way to do it.”

Techno pulls a face. “Why do you know that?”

Niki hesitates, “Because of my... side hustle.”

Ah. Looks like they’re calling being Aurelian, one of the most powerful vigilantes in L’Manberg a side hustle. Cool. Techno can work with that.

“Right,” Techno sighs, “Who the fuck even goes to City Hall? Surely the security is insane?”

Niki shrugs. She grabs her phone and Techno finally manages to grab his.

It’s like the bitch that controls his life, could not think of a better way to do this. Because they apparently like to watch him suffer, it’s almost like an act from God.

ant-eaters (derogatory):

You going to that charity thing?

L’Manburg School Relief, Tommy’s roommate is part of it

Good cause, did some research

it’s at city hall, you should go.

Techno looks up for a moment, that timing is... perfect. Almost too perfect, because Techno does not get things that easily. But it’s Wilbur, and Wilbur is trustworthy. But still, this all seems a bit too easy.

Instead of saying that, Techno types out a response. It’s a *very* in depth and meaningful response, and *very* easy to respond to. Techno is only the best texter in the fucking world, and this text shows it.

weird cosplayer:

sure.

He can already sense the rant he's getting from Wilbur tomorrow over that response, but he thinks it's funny. So he leaves it.

Putting his phone down, he looks up at the roof, running his fingers through Floof's fur and not saying anything.

Niki is also quiet, they both are really.

Floof eventually wakes up, and decides that Niki is his favourite, because he turns the cuteness all the way up and prances around the room. He looks at Niki and yaps.

Niki looks back at him. "What?" She asks, "What do you want, Floof?"

Floof yaps again.

"Okay, you know you're cute," Niki chides, "And are trying to get something out of it, what do you want?"

Floof yaps, very cutely, Techno might add.

"Wanna... stay with me tonight?" Niki asks, looking at Techno. "Or does Techno need Floof Support?"

"Techno does not need Floof support," Techno says, with an eye roll. "I am perfectly capable on my own."

“We both know that’s false,” Niki says, patting Floof, who makes a noise like that was his evil plan the entire time. “If you need Floof around tonight, that’s more than fine. Today’s been... stressful for you.”

Techno huffs and rolls his eyes, “I’m not going to have a nightmare because I’m stressed. If that was the case I’d have nightmares every night.”

“You’ve been having nightmares every night.”

“Have not.”

“Okay, you wake up screaming.”

“That’s... unrelated.”

Niki gives him a look. The look she gives him when he’s being stupid. He’s become quite familiar with that look, especially in these past few days. Especially when Techno locked himself in his apartment for a couple days and left Floof with Niki.

She had actually dragged him out of the apartment for groceries. Like... quite forcibly too. Apparently locking yourself away from society wasn’t good for mental health? Seemed fake, but okay.

“I’ll be fine,” Techno waves his hand. “Really.”

Niki gives him a look.

Techno gives her a look.

“Niki. Do you trust me?”

“Not in regards to your mental health.”

“Niki, I’m fine.” Techno says. “Floof can have a sleepover at his weird wine aunt’s.”

“Excuse me. I adopted that dog with you.”

“You were there, your name is not on the adoption papers.”

“Okay,” Niki gives him a look, and by that Techno *knows* that she’s going to play dirty. “I was the one who looked after him while you were in hospital, or the one who looks after him whenever you go on holiday—”

“I took him with me last time!”

“Or I’m the one who looks after him when you’re patrolling.”

“I tell you, you can leave him at home. He’s fine for a few hours.”

“How does he get home from the tower?” Niki asks, “What? Just run home.”

“He can.” Techno mumbles.

Niki laughs, and it’s very fond. The corners of her eyes crease and she throws her head back slightly. “I got stuff to do anyway,” Niki says, and she stands up. Brushing off her pants and looking at Floof.

They both know Niki doesn't have anything to do.

"Thanks," Techno mutters.

Niki just gives a smile. "No problem."

It's peaceful.

And hey... they'll be alright, he thinks. Everyone. They might get their shit together one day, today is not that day. But... hey, things are looking up for him, just in general. It's fixed with Tommy, slightly broken but on the mend. Wilbur will be there for him no matter what. Niki is supportive and kind.

It's odd... how this whole hybrid thing might be one of the best things to ever happen to him.

Chapter End Notes

Summary:

Tommy and Techno talk, it goes well for the both of them. Techno says he's not mad at Tommy, and Tommy has a small breakdown because he was called a good person for once and he can not process that.

Basically, (finally) bedrock bros have figured it out. And I am so happy about that.

Techno goes to check up on Wilbur after talking with Fundy about how Wilbur's doing. Fundy is dubbed as "one of Techno's favourite orphans" which I love for him. Techno goes up to the sky deck and the two of them just speak about the whole hybrid thing, they don't lie to each other because, idk they just don't.

When Techno gets home, he speaks to Niki. Niki is very chill, and a good friend. Floof is there and is cute. Basically this chapter is about three important conversations. Tommy, Wilbur and Niki.

No meme this chapter (y'all will cope) because I instead have some art! (Also I couldn't find a meme in my folder that fit, and could not be bothered to make one.) So art!
WOOOO

We have had many art being done in the TINAAOS discord (thank you so much, I love you all) and here are some of the recent gems. All credits to the actual artists, I just think everyone deserves to see how cool the art is!

[Floof In Technoblade Cosplay](#) by the lovely [Cait](#)

[Theseus In Costume](#) by [Wolfie](#)

[And Many Floof's](#) by [Cheddar](#)

So... it's been a hot minute, good news: you're getting more fluff. Bad news. Idk, there's no bad news right now. Everything's pretty chill

For anyone curious about the discord, and updates, (and reasons you should join). Here are some of the things that happened in the span between last chapter and this chapter.

- Philosophy talks
- Talking about hybrid burgers in TINA (not canon, not happening, no matter what you say Berry)
- There is a hypothetical dog called Steve. I will not explain that more, because it's funnier if it doesn't make sense.
- A war over Floof started (thanks Apollo /lh)
- The spirit of tina!wilbur took over apollo and I and we wrote a poem
- TINAAOS now has 100k hits, which is wild, so thank you everyone reading this. I love you all so much, and you have changed my life in the best way possible.

So [join the discord](#)! It's super chaotic and fun, and active at the weirdest of times.

In Which Tommy Gets A Break (For Real This Time)

Chapter Summary

Fluff. Literally just fluff.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: mentions of alcohol, food & eating

I have like five minutes to upload this. So it's a bit rushed. In this chapter we meet Clay (based off of one of my friends) who uses he/they pronouns which is why I switch between.

I HAVE TRIED TO UPLOAD THIS. *FIVE* SEPERATE TIMES. AND I AM GOING TO FUCKING AWUIHSCN

Summary at the end (it isn't good but it's there.)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Oi,” Wilbur says too early one morning.

Tommy looks up from his desk. “What?” He snaps.

“So,” Wilbur drawls, leaning against the door. “There’s this charity gala—”

“The one I invited you to,” Tommy deadpans. “I am aware.”

“And,” Wilbur continues, “I can have a plus one. Phil’s busy, he has some shit to do. Techno and Quackity are already going. And I think it would be cool for you to go.”

“No,” Tommy shuts down.

It's not that Tommy doesn't want to go. Okay, he also doesn't want to go. But he also doesn't want to go to a gala where rich people walk and talk about how unfortunate his life is, or how they're such good people. Tommy does not want to touch that capitalistic shit, he's more than good to... not.

Anyway, he doesn't even have anything to wear. Which seems like a hate crime, but what can he do? He has some sorta nice clothes.

And while his bank account is slowly and steadily getting fuller and fuller, with enough money that it's... weird. They can buy actual food now, afford groceries (it's wild.) And Ranboo doesn't even need to take as many shifts. He still can not afford a suit.

It's... so odd.

Like, is this how most people live? Because what are they complaining about? Making rent, buying actual food and not being sick because of unhealthy eating habits, what else do people do.

So... basically Tommy has found himself with a lot more energy.

And time. So much time, because he's not sleeping as much because he doesn't need to. He has... so much energy.

Does everyone else live like this?

“I don't have anything to wear,” Tommy eventually says, because that's easier. “I have like... semi good clothes, but they're not good enough for a charity gala.”

Wilbur grins leaning against the door, and Tommy knows not to trust that look. It means that Wilbur has a plan, and plans from Wilbur tend to end up with Tommy going somewhere.

Tommy does not want to go somewhere.

“So,” Wilbur drawls, “I’m just saying, you’ll probably need a suit anyway.”

“No.”

“And,” Wilbur continues, without a fucking care in the world. “Quackity is already taking Daniel to get a suit, so we could tag along.”

“Why?”

“Daniel’s going to the gala,” Wilbur says with a shrug, “Quackity invited him, apparently he sees something in Daniel, potential or some shit. Could be a really good fighter if he wanted to.”

Tommy raises an eyebrow, looking back at his laptop. “Ah yes, seeing potential in new employees, you would never.”

Wilbur’s mouth falls open, “Okay. Shut up.”

Tommy just rolls his eyes, “So why do you want me to go so bad, don’t you have... I dunno ladies throwing themselves at you. Or men. Or whatever, you get my point.”

Wilbur just gives Tommy a look, “Tommy.”

“Wilbur.”

“I entertain myself by annoying a teenager—”

“I’m nineteen.”

“Nineteen literally has teen in the name,” Wilbur retorts, “Does it look like I have any sort of friends? All my friends are already going and are taking all the good people. Like Schlatt’s going, and so is Quackity. Then boom, I have no more friends.”

Tommy looks up at him, sighing, “Wilbur. I have work to do, and I don’t really want to go to a charity gala. I would say I’m sorry, apart from the fact I’m not.”

Wilbur sighs, “Tommy.”

“Take Kristin,” Tommy says, giving Wilbur a blank look. “If Phil can’t go, then maybe Kristin can. Fundy?”

“He’s already going,” Wilbur mutters, “Kristin is busy, I asked,” Wilbur groans and slides down the doorframe like he’s been stabbed. “Tommy, please. I have no friends, I don’t wanna be alone.”

“Your friends are there?”

“Tommy, please.”

Tommy looks at Wilbur, expression flat. “No.”

“Tommy.”

“No.”

“Tommy, *pleasepleasepleasepleaseplease* .”

“Okay fine!” Tommy slams on his keyboard. “I’ll think about it.”

Which is a lie. He will not think about it.

He continues on with his day, living his best life. Editing, replying to some more people who want to do a film based on Phil. (The answer is no, the answer is always no, it has always been no.)

Purpled shows up, which isn’t shocking, he does that sometimes. He sits on the desk (the audacity of this bitch) and leans over so his head is next to Tommy’s.

Tommy doesn’t react.

Purpled prods him in the cheek.

Tommy also doesn’t react.

“Pst. Tommy.”

“Pst. P— Daniel.”

“You going to the gala?” Purpled asks, drawing out the last word, he’s smiling and Tommy isn’t sure how to feel about that.

“No.”

“Why?” Purpled asks loudly, he sighs, “Tommy, I have no friends there.”

Tommy gives him a look, “Why are you going then? If you’re gonna be so bored.”

“It’s at City Hall,” Purpled explains. He cuts himself off like that makes anything make more sense, it doesn’t, in fact it just makes Tommy slightly more confused. Purpled gives him a look that screams ‘are you kidding me?’

He sighs, dramatically.

Who knew Purpled was such a dramatic bitch?

“City Hall,” Purpled says again, which doesn’t make anything make more sense. “Fine, they have a bunch of files there. You can look for almost anything you need.”

Tommy gives Purpled a look. “What are you looking for?”

Purpled closes his mouth and shakes his head slightly.

Tommy knows to leave it, he’s not an idiot. Instead he turns back to his work and sighs slightly. Purpled leans back so that his head is resting on Tommy’s shoulder. It’s an odd way to do it, laying on the desk, but eh.

“Tommy.”

“I’m not going,” Tommy snaps, “Seriously, why does everyone want me to go so badly?”

“Because,” Purpled explains, “I don’t wanna be alone.”

Tommy sighs.

“No.” He says, as simple as that. “I don’t wanna hear rich people bitch about how broke I am.”

Purpled pulls a face, “You’re not even that broke anymore, you’re buying groceries? Ranboo takes far less shifts.”

Tommy gives him a look.

“What? You have it pretty good for someone in Logstedchire.”

Tommy gives him a look. “You live in Logstedchire.”

“No?” Purpled says pulling a face, “I live in Kinoko?”

“What?”

“You didn’t know? I’ve lived in Kinoko for years.”

“Oh.”

Tommy shrugs slightly. Purpled, pulls a face and rolls his eyes, he stands up and sighs again.

“Well, if you need any information. City Hall is the place to find it,” Purpled cracks his neck and Tommy winces. “See ya in a couple hours.”

“See ya.”

Tommy continues the monotony that’s his life. Nothing interesting is happening, nothing that Tommy needs to organise yet, he just gets handed more information for the charity gala. He finds out the seating plan.

Wilbur, Techno and Niki are on the same table, which is good for them. Hopefully Techno will manage social interaction by himself. Quackity, Purpled, Fundy and Dream are the table across and Tommy really wishes he could see how that entire interaction goes.

It’ll be very funny, that’s for sure.

He answers some emails, he edits some videos.

He then opens Twitter.

[@theseusiguess](#): so... anyone wanna start drama today? I am rather bored, tragically saving the city doesn’t happen all the fucking time. Some of us need *wages*.

[@theseusiguess](#): ayo. [@arandomintern](#) you like to start drama, hmu

[@arandomintern](#): FUCK YOU, NEVER CONTACT ME AGAIN

He hears Wilbur run down the hallway and skid slightly. “I got it!” Wilbur yells, “I traced Theseus’s connection.”

Techno shows up like nothing happened, and like he was there the entire time. He looks at Tommy, and he looks actually scared.

Wilbur is panting slightly. “He— fucking steals our Wi-Fi.”

“Huh?”

“Well,” Wilbur explains, “Because very few people can get up this high. It’s an open Wi-Fi connection, well it’s kinda protected but you just need to have a device connected and verified it’s face.”

Techno looks at Tommy.

“However!” Wilbur yells, “If you’re on top of the roof, you can also get that Wi-Fi and probably bypass the safety thing. Wi-Fi! Bastard is sitting on top of *my tower*. And stealing the Wi-Fi that we pay so much for.”

Techno looks at Tommy.

Tommy shrugs.

“So!” Wilbur adds, grinning like a mad man. “Next time Theseus Tweets, I’m going to run up there. And get him!”

“Are you?” Techno asks, “I mean, Theseus is pretty crafty— I don’t think you’re gonna outsmart him that easily.”

Tommy looks down at his phone.

Techno and him make eye-contact.

Techno tilts his head ever-so slightly.

Tommy leans back in his seat.

[@theseusiguess](#): so... who should I start drama with now, since *Tommy* is being a bitch.

He hears Wilbur's phone buzz.

Then Wilbur dashes out of the room.

Footsteps clunk down the hallway.

Techno and Tommy manage to keep it together for about five seconds.

Before they burst out laughing. Tommy clutches his stomach and he laughs so hard. Techno bangs his hand against the desk. Before hitting his forehead against the desk and falling over.

Tommy falls out of his chair and grabs onto his stomach.

Eventually after what feels like a lifetime they get it together. Tommy stands up and his stomach hurts. Techno and him look at each other and they burst into laughter again.

After a few attempts of that they get it together, Techno's grinning and Tommy's still clutching at his stomach.

“Have you had your lunch break?” Techno asks.

That’s how Tommy ends up sitting on the roof of a car.

He’s sitting in the carpark, on the roof of a car that doesn’t belong to either of them.

With Techno promising to have drinks with swirly straws.

Techno sighs, handing a drink to Tommy. Tommy’s not quite sure where it came from, apart from the fact that it does not look like something he should be drinking.

He looks at Techno, eyebrow raised. “This looks alcoholic.”

“Oh shit,” Techno mutters, he takes the drink back off of Tommy. “You’re a child. Banned.”

Tommy nods slowly, “Not that big on alcohol.”

“Me neither,” Techno mutters, “Where’s Wilbur when you need him?”

“He’s a drinker?”

“More than me,” Techno adds, they both look at the drink. Techno hands his drink over. “It’s just apple juice.”

“The great Blade, with apple juice?”

Techno gives Tommy a look. “Yes. The great Theseus who has avoided capture from Philza, Spectre and The Blade.”

“Ah yes, because you were trying,” Tommy says, sipping the drink. It is apple juice. Huh, that’s fun. “I could see the strain as you hid Purpled and I from the police and Phil.”

Techno nods, he moves so that he’s laying on the roof of the car. Tommy doesn’t even know whose car it is, he’s going to assume Phil’s because that’s very funny. It’s not too high off the ground, and Tommy is having the time of his life.

Someone walks out of the tower, holding two drinks, two swirly straws and a certain cute dog following after them. It’s Kristin, who looks slightly done with the entire thing, she huffs and brushes some hair out of her face.

“Another apple juice, and a puppuccino for the favourite.”

“A what?” Tommy says.

Floof hops up on the car with no hesitation, he can’t clamber up the windshield to Techno so he just barks longingly.

Techno sighs, and picks Floof up. Floof seems happy enough with this, as Techno grabs the drinks from Kristin.

“Thank you, Kristin,” Techno gives a bright smile to Kristin, and Kristin rolls her eyes.

“No problem,” Kristin deadpans, “You owe me lunch with Phil for this—”

“I know, I know,” Techno says, sounding incredibly fucking amused about the entire thing. “I’ll make sure he’s not busy Thursday, but you have to ask him.”

Kristin groans, “Techno.”

“Fine, fine, I’ll get him to the cafe across from the tower and mysteriously ditch. Good enough for you?”

Kristin grins, “Yup!”

“Thank you,” Techno says again.

Kristin walks off, looking slightly more genetic than when she walked out.

“And they say love is dead,” Tommy mutters to the sky, Techno huffs at that.

They’re sitting on the roof of a car, with apple juice, swirly straws and Floof has a cup of whipped cream. It truly is a time for the... Tommy community, he sighs slightly and Techno just looks at him.

“What?” Tommy says.

Techno shrugs.

Meanwhile, Floof is attacking that puppuccino with the force of a thousand suns. He has whipped cream all over his nose, and truthfully, it’s not one of Floof’s best looks.

Floof pauses, as if he’s aware he’s being judged. He looks up at Tommy, the fury of a thousand suns in his eyes.

He has a lot of audacity for a dog who can’t even wipe his own face.

Floof blinks at him.

Tommy blinks back.

“I’m not scared of you,” Tommy says, “I can scratch behind your ears and then you’re a useless ball of fluff.”

“Hey—” Techno starts, although it’s weak.

Tommy just sips at his apple juice, using the ridiculously swirly straw to do so. There’s something fun about it.

Techno mutters something under his breath, and sunglasses are being shoved onto Tommy’s face.

Tommy stops from having his apple juice (which is quite rude, Techno.) And looks at Techno, it’s all slightly less bright. And more enjoyable in general, but still Tommy squints at Techno. Mostly to prove his point.

“Why?” Tommy gestures at the sunglasses that have been forced on his eyes.

“People with blue eyes are weaker to the sun,” Techno explains, “And I want you to be able to see things.”

“Seeing is overrated.”

Tommy leaves the sunglasses on.

“You know,” Techno starts, “They have a bunch of records at City Hall, on this bigass computer.”

“Mhmm…” Tommy adds sleepily.

They stay silent for a moment longer.

Techno hums, drawing attention back to him.

“Hey, Tommy?”

“Tech?”

“If you could have anything in the world, what would it be?”

“What sorta question is that?” Tommy asks tiredly.

“Icebreaker.”

“Pretty fucking dense icebreaker.”

“I don’t like small talk.”

Tommy hums, thinking about it for a moment. That’s difficult, he wants a lot of things. But he doesn’t get a lot of things. He wants Ranboo and Tubbo to be safe, he wants to be safe. He wants to leave L’Manberg and he wants to set down roots that will stay here forever.

He wants a lot really.

Tommy rubs his eyes.

“I think...” Tommy says, “I just want my friends to be safe.”

“Yeah?” Techno says, and if that isn’t a segway then Tommy isn’t Theseus.

“We’re scared a lot,” Tommy says to the sky. “Tubbs, Ranboo and I. P— Daniel too, we’re all scared a lot. For ourselves, for each other. I just want to stop being scared, and for my friends to stop being scared too.”

Techno nods, his face in a thoughtful expression. “That’s really sad.”

“Yeah,” Tommy mutters, “What about you?”

Techno also hums, it appears that he thinks about it for a moment. “I think I have everything I want,” he says slowly, “I’m safe, most of my family is as safe as they can be. I don’t really struggle like I used to. I wouldn’t even change my past.”

“No?”

“Nah,” Techno shakes his head, and there’s the ghost of a smile on his lips. “Without that past, I wouldn’t have Wilbur and Phil in my life. And I can’t imagine my life without them, no matter how hard I try.”

“Mhmm,” Tommy tries to shake away the sleep that’s sneaking up on him. “That’s not an answer though.”

Techno groans, “Uh. Revenge, on that fucking person that headed the rings. I fucking want him gone, I want him to stop hurting me, and others—”

Tommy hums, “Okay.”

And... there’s the semblance of an idea in Tommy’s mind.

Maybe, just maybe, he can make it up to Techno slightly. If he finds the guy. Maybe, Techno will hate him just a little bit less.

City Hall.

City Hall would be where to find that.

Looks like he is going to the gala now.

He looks up at the sky, it's a clear day, there's not a lot up there. A couple clouds, and the looming mess of a shape the tower is, but he can ignore that pretty easily. The car is warm against his back, and vaguely he's aware by the odd wisp of pink hair that Techno is sitting next to him.

Floof pitters against the car roof every now and again.

It's nice.

It's peaceful.

Turns out Tommy really needed this.

"Tech?" Tommy asks, into the air, hoping that Techno will hear him.

He does.

"Yeah?"

Tommy shrugs, "Thanks. I suppose."

"Anytime."

And like that, they're done. That's all they need to say. Tommy sits up, and grabs his apple juice, which he holds in his hand.

Techno does the same and Floof is currently trying to tear the cup apart with his teeth. Which Tommy loves for Floof! He can appreciate the effort that Floof is putting into this, because the cup is starting to rip.

It must be an odd sight.

Two people sitting on the roof of a car, holding glasses with curly straws. One with glasses. And a slightly unhinged dog who is trying to tear a paper cup apart.

It's really a sight.

Tommy blinks a few times, before glancing at Techno.

Techno just gives him a flat look.

“What?”

“What?” Tommy repeats. “I think... I'm gonna go to that gala.”

“Oh.” Techno says, “Wilbur will be happy about that.”

And that is certainly correct.

Tommy discovers this.

He tells Kristin that he's going, and Kristin then tells everyone in the foyer.

Tommy has decided not to tell Wilbur, and instead let him find out.

When Wilbur eventually finds out through the grapevine, Tommy can pinpoint the exact moment.

Tommy is at his desk, answering an email. Wilbur shrieks, and his footsteps are heard up the hall. He slams the door open, and looks at Tommy, grinning widely and looking so excited it almost hurts.

Wilbur grins a bit brighter, "Tommy, Tommy, Tommy. Thomas—"

"Yes," Tommy says, keeping the cheer out of his voice, but hey, at least it's funny. "I know, I'll go with you."

Wilbur reaches forwards, probably to hug Tommy—

Again, the reaction is totally out of his control, his brain puts his body into auto pilot.

Because he yanks Wilbur's arm forward, then twists it around in a way that Tommy *could* break Wilbur's wrist.

Wilbur just sounds vaguely offended, not even hurt.

Tommy jerks his arm away and blinks at Wilbur. "I am so sorry— I didn't—"

“Nice!” Wilbur grins brightly, “That was really good, who trained you again?”

“Uh. My friend,” Tommy half-lies. It’s not a lie, it’s an omission of information. Tommy’s just not mentioning that his friend is also a vigilante, and the two of them trained together for two years—

Yeah. He’ll keep that quiet.

“They’re good,” Wilbur says, shaking his arm slightly. “Should bring them in on training day one day.”

Yeah... Purpled probably will be there next training day.

Wilbur grins, “So, so, so, Tommy. Tommy. Tommy. Let me go suit shopping with you—”

“Okay,” Techno’s voice bursts through the room. “Wilbur, you can only dress yourself. You’re gonna dress Tommy as a little Wilbur, and we do not need that—”

“We do.” Wilbur argues.

“We do not,” Techno argues back, “In fact. We’re simply not going to do that. For everyone’s sake. He’d be even more insufferable.”

“What?” Wilbur snarls, although there isn’t much heat in it. “You’d rather him look like you? With that ugly ass haircut.”

Techno runs a hand through his hair, “Okay, this was a trauma acquired haircut, it’s not supposed to look good. You can’t insult me for ugly ass haircuts, when you look at that rat’s nest that you call hair.”

Wilbur's mouth falls open, and he goes to swing at Techno.

Techno ducks out of the way, underneath Wilbur's arm so that he's actually in the office. He flips off Wilbur.

Wilbur goes for another swing, and it hits.

There's a hitting noise.

Before Wilbur yelps in pain, he hops on the spot clutching his hand. "What the fuck?" Wilbur screeches. He hops and down a bit longer, holding his hand, before looking at Techno with betrayal in his eyes.

"What the fuck are you?" Wilbur hisses, voice cracking slightly from pain.

"Piglin hybrid," Techno deadpans, "Do you need the powerpoint again?" Techno looks over his shoulder, "I can go grab it—"

"No, no, no," Wilbur shakes his head, "I'm good." He hisses and shakes his hand slightly. "Henry, do I have any injuries?"

"No, Wilbur Soot," Henry's voice bursts through the room. "You do not have any injuries."

"Apart from his pride," Tommy adds.

"Precisely, Thomas."

"Henry, I would die for you."

“Then perish,” Henry says, before an awkward pause. “Did I use that meme right?”

“Yes,” Tommy sighs, “Yes, you did.”

Wilbur clicks his fingers, effectively drawing attention to himself. The fucking attention theatre. The bad theatre kid. Was Wilbur a theatre kid? That makes a lot about him make more sense.

Tommy looks at him, expression flat. “Yes?”

Wilbur grins, “Come suit shopping, with me—”

“—and me.”

Wilbur pauses and looks at Techno. “Dude.”

“I don’t have a suit!” Techno defends, “Neither does Niki. My last one caught on fire.”

“Quackity, Daniel and Dream are also going...” Wilbur adds. “We seriously can not do a group suit shopping experience. Remember last time?”

“Dream and I had nothing to do with that building burning down!”

“You were playing with matches?”

Techno stays silent, looking down at the ground and shifting slightly. “Shut up,” he mumbles.

Tommy sighs, “Why not? What’s the worst that could happen?”

Ah. *Ah.*

He should not have let this happen.

Purpled is sitting on the fridge (again), scrolling on his phone. He's also eating a bagel. Where did he get the bagel from? Tommy has no fucking idea. He did not arrive at home with it.

Tommy is trying to explain to Tubbo what the difference between a simile and metaphor are.

("They're the same!")

"No, no they are not."

("That's the same thing!")

Tommy's phone buzzes, and he picks it up, because that's easier than dealing with Tubbo.

Wilbur Soot:

How have I never texted you before?

Okay, I'll pick you up at nine tomorrow

You have the day off, and don't have to pay

He looks up at Purpled. "Oi, are you staying the night?"

Purpled nods without looking up from his phone.

Thomas Underscore:

Can you pick up Daniel too?
He's staying the night

Wannabe Theatre Kid:
Sure.

Don't be late.

He wasn't planning on it.

He looks at Purpled who's still on his phone.

"Go on patrol."

Purpled looks at him. "Dude."

"I went on patrol last! Logstedchire needs protection!"

"Aurelian's out!" Purpled argues, holding up his phone and shaking it to the point where Tommy can't see it. "She was spotted beating the shit outta some guys, it's fine."

"We can not have one person patrolling all of Logstedchire," Tommy chides.

"We will," Purpled mutters, slightly bitterly. "You patrol."

"No."

"Well why do I have to patrol?"

“You were the guy in the chair last time!”

“I’m going to bed.”

Tommy stares at Purpled. “Jokes on you asshole, we share a bedroom.”

Purpled glares.

Tommy grins.

Neither of them end up going on patrol.

That is because Tommy passes out the second he hits the mattress.

He doesn’t dream. It’s peaceful for once.

He wakes up.

There’s moving on the floor, where the air mattress is.

A quiet noise too, like someone’s trying to suppress their cries.

Tommy sits up slowly.

Purpled looks at him, eyes wide.

His hand is clapped over his mouth, and his eyes are filled with tears. He looks at Tommy for a long moment, before dropping his hand and taking a deep breath, obviously trying to steady himself.

“You okay?” Purpled asks, voice almost perfectly even.

“I should be askin’ you that.”

“I’m fine.”

“You look like you were crying.”

“I’m not doing this, Tommy,” Purpled says, and it’s terrifying how even his voice is. “I’m fine.”

“You don’t sound fine.”

Purpled gives him a look, “I just remember something, that’s all.”

“That’s not good,” Tommy says as he spins around so that he’s facing him, and Purpled continues to give him a look. It’s almost funny. “What did you remember?”

“Something.”

“That’s specific,” Tommy deadpans.

Purpled just looks at him. “I hate you.”

“No you don’t.”

“I do.”

“You simply do not,” Tommy gestures between the two of them. “Ah yes, because when you hate someone you basically move in with them.”

“Maybe I’m just figuring out the best way to kill all three of you,” Purpled mutters.

“I know you have a gun under your pillow,” Tommy sighs, “You could just. Y’know, shoot us?”

Purpled glares, before picking up his pillow and hugging it tight. He still glares slightly at Tommy, but that’s funny, because there isn’t any real heat behind it.

Tommy grins and leans back so he’s hanging half off the bed, looking at Purpled upside down. Purpled just looks tired.

“I—” Purpled screws up his nose, “It’s complicated.”

“That’s alright,” Tommy tilts his head, “Complicated is fine.”

“You’re gonna think I’m weird.”

“I already think you’re weird,” Tommy deadpans, “I mean. You like pineapple on pizza.”

“I don’t *like* it,” Purpled mutters, “I just don’t mind it. I lived on the streets—”

“Me too!” Tommy laughs, “And still I have better standards than that.”

Purpled groans and lays back down, head next to the gun that he left on the mattress.

They’re both quiet for a moment, Tommy isn’t sure whether that’s because Purpled is gaining the courage to say something, or if neither of them have anything to say. It makes sense to end that conversation there—

It’s dark, the only light is from a streetlight that filters through the blinds and onto the bed.

Purpled takes a deep breath, “Tommy? Can I move in with you guys?”

Tommy looks at him. “Huh.”

“I mean, it’s fine if I can’t— it’s already pretty crowded here. But I’d pay my share of rent or whatever—” Purpled looks over at Tommy. “Can I?”

“Fuckin’ finally,” Tommy mutters, “Yes. Please, I need someone to explain the difference between metaphors and similes to Tubbo.”

Purpled smiles, it’s a small smile and Tommy almost misses it. “Cool.” Purpled mutters, he turns over and faces the wall. “Cool.”

It’s silent for a longer moment, and neither of them say anything. Because there’s not really a lot to say about it. Purpled’s going to move in, it’s that simple, yet that complicated. They’re both silent.

Purpled rolls over, so he’s looking back at Tommy. “Hey Tommy?”

“Mhmm?”

“Thank you.”

“Anytime.”

And they both go to sleep, and for once Tommy doesn't wake up remembering flashes of red and the utter heat that had surrounded him.

In fact his day goes a little bit like this:

“Where's my hoodie?” Purpled screeches.

“I don't fuckin' know!” Tommy yells back, searching through the washing basket. “It's not here!”

Tubbo and Ranboo have gone to school.

Hence the chaos.

“Where the fuck would it be?” Purpled cries out.

“I don't know!”

Tommy's phone buzzes, and he picks it up. It's a photo of Wilbur, just a generic one he took so he knew who it was when people called him. It's Wilbur.

Tommy picks up the phone and tucks it between his shoulder and neck. “Wilbur.”

“You good?” Wilbur asks, “What’s all the screaming?”

“P— Daniel can’t find his hoodie.”

“Fuck off!” Purpled yells at him. “It was under the bed!”

“Why was it there?” Tommy yells back.

“I don’t know!”

“Okay,” Tommy grabs his backpack off the bench, avoiding some dishes to grab it.

The house is *very* messy, none of them have had the time to clean up yet, he’ll ask Ranboo to do it when he gets home. Ranboo’s been complaining about being bored anyway. Having too much time. (Tommy could never.) “We’re going!”

Purpled swears, and walks out of the bedroom, head half way through a hoodie.

A black one, because Purpled is a traitor to his own name.

Purpled runs past him, and Tommy locks the door behind them.

They run down the stairs, and Purpled almost falls onto his face.

Wilbur’s waiting in the car, Techno’s in the front seat too and Techno looks more than done with his existence. Someone that Tommy doesn’t know is also in the car, but she has pink hair.

Okay then. Tommy runs up to the car and knocks on the window.

Wilbur shrieks and jumps back.

Techno bursts into laughter.

Tommy opens the door to the car.

“Hi!” Tommy announces.

“Hi!” The woman responds back with a bright tone. “Niki,” she holds her hand out and Tommy takes it.

“Tommy,” Tommy says, clambering into the car, and sitting next to her. “That’s Daniel.”

“Lovely to meet you,” Niki says as Tommy puts on his seatbelt and Purpled clambers into the car next to him. “Techno has told me a lot about you Tommy.”

“Good!” Tommy says, clicking his belt in as Purpled struggles to close the door. “He makes me earn my worth.”

“Do not.”

“Do so.”

Wilbur sighs.

Niki just smiles, and Tommy looks at her.

He knows that Purpled already has all of his freaky opinions. The same way that Tubbo can, they just look at people and know shit about them.

Tommy's not great, but he looks at Niki and there's... something kind there, that's for sure, a certain softness in her eyes. But there's also the look of '*I can and will fuck you up.*' Which Tommy respects.

He looks back ahead, and at Techno.

"So," Techno drawls, "Any ideas for colours?"

Wilbur sighs, "Your small talk is awful. How was staying over at Tommy's, Daniel?"

"Good," Purpled says, there's actual inflection in his voice. Ah. Customer service voice then. "It was fun, even if Tommy snores super loud."

"You snore!"

"I do not," Purpled snaps, "I sleep silently. Like a ninja."

"You're not a ninja."

"Am too."

"I wish you were a ninja."

Purpled is silent for a beat. “Me too.”

The car is silent.

Wilbur turns up the radio.

“Last night, vigilante Aurelian—”

Techno turns that down, and looks in the rearview mirror.

Purpled shifts in his seat. Niki doesn’t do much, she just looks bored. Tommy sits there looking at his lap.

“So how about that weather, huh?” Techno says, “It’s been getting warmer.”

“Yeah,” Tommy says, deciding now is the *perfect* time to do a smooth transition to another subject. “I miss Winter already. It’s warm, what am I supposed to do? Take off my skin? I’m not a snake hybrid.”

“Snake hybrids don’t take off their skin, Tommy,” Techno sighs, “They like... have bits of their skin flake off.”

“Who made you the expert on hybrids—” Tommy pauses, “Oh, wait.”

Techno laughs, “Great job Tommy, only you, only you.”

“Thank you, thank you, I try. Remember me when you’re in Pandora’s.”

Techno laughs again, this time hitting his hand against the dashboard. “You little shit.”

“No rent,” Purpled adds thoughtfully. “Don’t have to pay for food. Maybe I’ll become a vigilante, one way trip there.”

Tommy nods thoughtfully, “You have the right idea, Dan.”

“Hmm,” Purpled looks at Tommy with fake thoughtfulness. “I think you should... be like Purpled.”

Tommy laughs. “Fucking Purpled? The worst vigilante of Logstedchire? Nah, I wanna be like... Theseus, or Aurelian... or Slimecicle, anyone *apart* from Purpled now that I think about it. What’s his power? Fuckin’ guns?”

Purpled glares at him. “What’s Aurelian's then? She’s not even powered.”

“Is so!” Tommy argues, “She has the,” he clicks his fingers together, trying to think of it. “Like the fight or flight shit. The fuckin’ fear thing.”

“Ooooh,” Purpled nods, “Fair, fair. I wanna be Aurelian. That’s such a cool power set, much better than Theseus’s.”

“Theseus has energy manipulation,” Niki adds. “That has almost unlimited potential.”

Wilbur does not look very comfortable with this conversation.

And good. Suffer.

“But that’s basic,” Purpled groans, “Fuckin’ glowy hand magic. It’s not even specified!”

“That’s the point,” Niki adds, she’s smiling slightly. “I fully believe Theseus could topple this country if he wanted to. His power set is so broad, as opposed to vigilantes like Slimecicle, Aurelian and Purpled’s.”

Techno hums thoughtfully, “True. Theseus could be very overpowered, he hasn’t used his power for much though. I’d say Purpled is the coolest one.”

Wilbur groans, “I don’t wanna hear about how much you like Purpled again, we get it. You like people with knives.”

“*Super accuracy* , Wilbur.” Techno says, glancing at his brother, “That’s like the best power.”

“Energy manipulation,” Niki adds. “That’s *so* cool, what are you on about Techno?”

“Super accuracy!” Techno exclaims again.

The car is silent, and everyone looks at Wilbur.

Wilbur sighs, “Energy manipulation is the coolest.”

Niki and Tommy yell in celebration, and Tommy looks at Purpled. “Get fucked. The hero says it, it must be true.”

“Techno’s a hero?” Purpled asks.

“He was a vigilante first,” Tommy waves a hand, “He barely counts.”

“Oi! I went through the training like everyone else.”

“Well— most of us had been training since we were ten. You rocked up and handed our asses to us—”

“I was training too,” Techno deadpans expression flat. “Just in an underground fighting ring that has traumatised me.”

Wilbur whistles, “What the fuck am I supposed to say to that?”

“Not poggers.” Tommy suggests.

“Oof.” Niki adds.

“L.” Purpled adds, as helpful as ever.

The three of them look at each other before bursting out laughing.

Wilbur sighs, and for a moment it looks like he seriously considers running the car into a fucking tree. Instead Wilbur indicates.

“Tommy,” Wilbur asks, “Do you have your license?”

“Nope.”

“What?” Wilbur says, eyes still on the road. Truly a responsible driver, not driving like a fucking madman. “You’re nineteen.”

“Never had anyone take me, asshole,” Tommy snaps. “I didn’t exactly know many good drivers.”

“I can drive,” Techno mutters, “Please. Let me take you driving.”

“You don’t have a license!”

“I can drive.”

“When did you learn to drive?” Niki asks, she appears to be actually thinking about it. “You don’t have a car.”

Techno just grins, showing slightly too-sharp teeth. “Fourteen. Hotwired a car to get away from Phil. I learned pretty quickly.”

“What the fuck Technoblade?”

Techno shrugs, “I *can* drive. The government doesn’t trust me to drive.”

“Hey!” Tommy says, “Tubbo has that.”

“Mhmm,” Purpled nods solemnly. “He does,” he shudders slightly like he’s remembering something, and he might be. “Let’s all be thankful Tubbo fucking Underscore does not have a license.”

Tommy nods, “Let’s be thankful.”

The two of them have a moment of silence, where both of them thank every deity out there for not giving Tubbo Underscore a license.

Wilbur sighs, and parks the car. “I’ll take you driving some time. Or Phil—”

“Probably Phil—” Techno cuts in, “Look, I love you Wilbur, but you are a terrible teacher.”

“Am not!”

“Are too!” Techno yells back, “Remember trying to teach me trig?”

“No. No, I do not.”

“Okay,” Techno flounders for a moment. “Remember trying to teach me how to surf?”

“You just suck!”

“Phil taught me in like three seconds.”

Wilbur sighs and turns into a parking lot, with another huff, and a glare at Techno.

It takes him a hot second to find a good park, and a significant amount of swearing. Niki is trying to be helpful, as Purpled and Techno start crying with laughter when someone pulls into Wilbur’s park.

Tommy just sits there, recording the entire thing.

What can he say? It’s the PR in him.

Wilbur eventually finds a car park and doesn’t even have a mental breakdown over it.

The five of them file out of the car, Niki grabs her handbag, and Tommy grabs his backpack that collectively holds both Purpled and his vigilante gear, and some stuff on top in case someone goes looking.

Wilbur sighs and shoves his hands in his pocket. “Are we getting them properly fitted?”

“Don’t have time,” Niki says, looking at the group of them. “Hurry up, we’re already late.”

“Sorry, sorry,” Wilbur mutters, and Niki smiles, it’s full of teeth and looks legitimately amused. “Tommy, Daniel, hurry it up.”

Purpled rolls his eyes, but doesn’t talk back, instead follows after Wilbur and Niki. Techno and Tommy follow after them.

“Suit in the bag?” Techno asks, keeping his voice low.

Tommy nods his head.

Techno hums and shoves his hands into his pocket. “Cool. I won’t let anyone touch it.”

“Thank you.”

Tommy swings the bag over his shoulder.

The store that Wilbur turns into is a damn fancy one. With that nice sorta wood carvings of a door, the only store that could be in Upper L’Manberg. And yeah... Tommy can not afford this, he’s going to have to sell a kidney.

“Holy shit,” Purpled breaths.

Tommy and Purpled look at each other.

“Go on,” Techno says from behind them. “You’re not paying.”

“Are you sure?” Tommy asks, “I mean I can—”

“You need a good suit,” Techno explains, “It’s a business expense, the company can pay.”

“If you’re sure.”

Techno nods.

The store is lovely, with jackets and pants laying around everywhere. The carpet was a deep red with a swirling pattern. One of the walls was covered with large windows, that was the storefront.

And the back had several doors that Tommy assumed were change rooms.

Sure enough, Dream and Quackity were already here. Quackity was talking to someone excitedly. Dream was leaning against the wall, he was just wearing a normal face mask, instead of his whole hero thing.

“You’re blond?” Is the first thing that Tommy asks.

Dream looks up from his phone, “I— you’re blond.”

Tommy takes a few more steps towards Dream. He has freckles and green eyes. “Ew. You have an actual face.”

“Yes, Tommy— I have an actual face.”

Wilbur puts a hand on Tommy’s shoulder, “Tommy.”

“He has an actual face!” Tommy turns to look at Wilbur, “I just thought there was like a void under that mask.”

Wilbur sighs again, “Sorry, Dream.”

Dream shrugs, “It’s funny. So.”

Wilbur huffs again, “Tommy. You don’t tell people they have actual faces, most people are painfully aware that they have faces.”

Tommy huffs and turns back to Quackity.

Quackity spies Techno and freezes up almost completely.

“Is... Floof here?” Quackity asks slowly.

“No, he is not.” Techno rolls his eyes, “He’s with Kristin.”

Quackity relaxes.

Niki looks at Dream, “I’m Niki! Lovely to meet you.”

“Dream,” he says, holding out his hand which Niki takes. “The one terrified of Floof is Quackity.”

“I know!” Niki grins.

“Shut up!” Quackity yells from behind a rack of clothes. “Drem.”

“Don’t even.”

“Drem.”

“Fuck right off—”

Someone walks up to them, a woman with a tight ponytail and perhaps the crispest suit that Tommy had ever seen. She looks between the lot of them, before her eyes stop on Purpled and Tommy—

Okay that’s just rude.

Tommy sighs slightly. Purpled does the same thing next to them.

“Can I help you?” She says, looking at Wilbur.

“Yup,” Tommy announces because he’s offended that she’s being a bitch. “We need... some suits. Uh— Niki are you getting a suit?”

Niki nods.

“Yup,” Tommy finishes, “Seven suits please.”

“I was not talking to you,” she snaps.

Wilbur’s eyebrows shoot up on his forehead, he looks at Tommy, then at the lady and then at Purpled.

“Oh you bitch,” Techno mutters underneath his breath.

Tommy slaps his hand over his mouth so he stops himself from laughing.

“Sorry,” Niki says, stepping forwards and taking charge which... fair. “But he’s spot on, seven suits. If it helps I imagine Daniel and Tommy are a similar size, along with Techno and Dream.”

The woman looks at her blankly.

“Can we speak to someone else?” Purpled asks.

Tommy notices the way that he makes his words a bit sharper, and his voice just a smidgen higher. Imitating Tubbo’s and Wilbur’s accents.

And he also notices how the woman straightens up and turns around.

Everyone looks at Purpled.

Purple shrugs, “You’d be shocked with whatcha can get away with by making your voice like Wilbur’s.”

“Hello!” Tommy says in a high-pitched voice that does not even sound like Wilbur at all. “I am Wimblur Scoot and I like Hamilton and being sad.”

Techno snorts, “You call that an impression?” He takes a deep breath.

Niki says something under her breath and Dream snorts.

“Tech—” Techno says in a voice that is almost exactly Wilbur’s in fact, Tommy looks at Wilbur to make sure he’s not saying it. But no, it’s Techno. “Stop being an idiot— sand is good for your health.”

Everyone stares at Techno.

Techno shrugs, “I learnt it to get Wilbur in trouble, it worked very well.”

“I don’t even remember that,” Wilbur hisses.

Techno grins, all toothily, before patting Wilbur on the head. “Remember that time that Phil made you do chores for a week.”

“Yes.”

Techno just grins.

Wilbur opens his mouth to respond.

Someone walks over to them this time, although he looks significantly younger than the woman from before.

He's also stylish, but in a chill way.

No suit, which... fair. But he is wearing dress pants and a button-up shirt, he also has some *lovely* blue boots with little bees on them. Light brown hair that's still short, but looks like it needs a haircut slightly, (a bit like Tommy's).

He looks between the group of them before breaking into a smile. "Okay! Nice to have you all here today. Can—" he looks between the group of them, more carefully this time. "You, and you." He gestures at Dream and Techno, "Go with Sandra over there."

Techno mutters something and Dream does too, but they both go with Sandra.

"You, young man," he says, looking at Quackity. Before his eyes drift to Niki. He's comparing heights. "And you ma'am, could you go with... Joanne? She's by the ties, thank you, thank you."

He looks at Wilbur and laughs nervously, "You are tall."

"I get that a lot," Wilbur deadpans.

"Over with... Kevin."

The man turns to Tommy, and Purpled too. "And you two are with me."

"Oh." Tommy says, "What's your name?"

“Clay!” He says with a smile, “You two are?”

“Tommy.”

“Daniel.”

“Nice, nice,” Clay says, ushering them through a door and to the left to what Tommy would call a store room.

The room is a bunch of shelves and boxes, with what looks like to be another change room off to the side. There are cobwebs, but again, that’s fine. Tommy can live with that.

It’s a bit dodgy, but Tommy’s more than alright with that. “Okay,” Clay explains, “I’m not going to murder you, here’s where we keep the new ones. Daniel is bulkier than the average teenager and Tommy you are too small for the average teenager so we’re gonna make some adjustments. The rest of them have pretty normal proportions so we don’t have to do anything to their suits.”

“You can do that all?” Tommy asks, “By looking at us in hoodies?”

Clay sighs, “Yeah. We never found out whether that was my very mild superpower, or if I’ve just been working here too long.” They get something out of a box, before looking at it and squinting. “What colour?”

Purpled shrugs.

Clay sighs, a bit more tiredly this time. “You’re really making me do everything around here.” They turn back around and look at Purpled, eyes narrowed. “Okay. Let me think. You won’t suit pink.”

“Okay?”

Clay groans again, before throwing a bit of fabric at Purpled. “Stop being difficult.”

Purpled rolls his eyes.

Clay sighs again and looks at Tommy. “Red.”

“Huh?”

“You’re a red kinda guy.”

“What does that even mean?”

“Maroon suit,” Clay mutters.

They move around the storeroom, looking through some boxes. Muttering under their breath, before he opens up one of the boxes and nods to himself. Dragging that box out, he carefully unfolds the suit inside. “Maroon jacket, black pants and a black button up. That works for you.”

“Huh?” Tommy asks.

Clay shakes his head and turns around to Tommy. “I do not have the energy for customer service mode, so be quiet.”

“Is that why you’re with us?” Purpled asks.

Clay nods. “You can pick the ones who don’t care a mile away.” Clay turns around and looks at Purpled. “You seem like a purple sorta dude.”

“Do I?” Purpled asks.

Clay nods. “Yes. Now I don’t want to make you look like the Joker, so we’re gonna have a similar vibe to Tommy. Purple blazer and pants, and a black button up. Ideally you have one with a pattern on it.”

“I do.”

“Cool,” Clay says, they go to another box and grab something out absent-mindedly before handing it to Purpled. Purpled nods, and looks around.

“Change room to the left,” Clay says, without even looking. He picks up a shirt from on a rack next to him and throws it in Purpled’s direction. Who catches it easily and turns around to go and get changed.

That leaves Tommy. All by himself, and needing to make some social interaction.

“Why maroon?” Tommy asks, “Also— how expensive will this be?”

“Don’t worry about it,” Clay says easily, waving a hand. “You’re not paying anyway, you’re with heroes, what sorta hero makes you pay for a suit that you don’t want.”

“Am I that obvious?”

“You hold yourself like someone who doesn’t want to be here, like someone who has a lot to hide—”

“What the fuck?” Tommy says.

Clay looks over their shoulder and shrugs at Tommy. “I dunno. You’re probably hiding a secret crush or something, I doubt that you have very exciting secrets. Most people think they’re a bigger deal than they are, you’re just some kid, I’m just some dude. We lead very normal lives.”

“Do we?”

Clay gives a smile, something knowing there, they shrug. “I don’t.”

“What does that even mean—”

“Whatever you think it should mean.”

Tommy blinks.

Pulling out another box, Clay grabs out the suit that he apparently wanted, and holds it up. It has a maroon blazer, with black pants and a black button up too. He holds it against Tommy.

Clay hums. “Okay, we’ll have to bring it in a little. But it fits pretty well, that can just be a quick touch up. Oh yeah, and trying it on.” Clay hits the door and Purpled makes a noise. “Hurry it up.”

Purpled sighs, and opens the door.

He’s wearing the suit (shockingly enough.) It’s purple with a more greyish tone to it, maybe mauve. Purpled looks oddly natural in it, he stretches slightly and tries to adjust the collar on the shirt.

Clay hums, “Okay. Too long. We can hem up the pants and make the jacket slightly shorter.”

“Cool,” Clay says. “Come ‘ere, lemme pin it. Tommy, go get changed.”

Tommy nods, and steps into the change room.

Purpled’s hoodie and jeans are neatly folded in the corner, almost eerily so. Where is this energy when Purpled’s leaving clothes all across the floor?

Tommy sighs and starts to get into the suit. He’s never really worn a suit before, he didn’t go to his parent’s funeral, he’s never really had a reason to. He certainly could never afford one, and didn’t really need to wear one as he was growing up.

It’s not *difficult*. It’s just that Tommy is terrified of breaking it, he eventually shrugs on the jacket, being too careful. He buttons that up before moving his arms around slowly. It has a good amount of mobility.

Not as much as he’d like, but enough that he’ll be able to dance... or whatever people do at charity galas.

Shit. What *do* people do at charity galas? Raise money?

Tommy grabs his phone and gives Google a quick spin.

Fundraising is most of the results... raffles or auctions. Right, okay. Tommy will simply just find Purpled and hang with him for all of the night, that’s something that Tommy can do. Just avoid everyone.

L'Manburg School Relief.

They better be grateful that Tommy got Wilbur there, otherwise... he's going to demand a pay rise until someone actually gives him a pay rise. He already fully believes he should be paid more but *nooooo*.

Tommy opens the door and stands in the doorway.

Purpled looks a bit dumb, the cuffs of his sleeves and pants have been pinned up, and so has the bottom of the suit jacket. Purpled sighs and gives Tommy the flattest look he can, Tommy just gives a thumbs up.

Clay looks over, holding a silk pin in their mouth. They look Tommy up and down. Before humming. They take the pin out of their mouth and attaching it to Purpled's suit. Purpled lifts up his arm and looks at the pinned cuff.

"Are we done?"

"Yup." Clay says, before looking at Tommy. "Hmm," Clay says, scrunching up their nose. "Okay. That's... better than what I thought it would be. Bit too loose, but far better than Daniel's."

Clay doesn't say anything and turns around to one of the boxes, they put something back in there before turning back around to facing Tommy. "Okay. So that doesn't fit properly, but I can see how uncomfortable you are in that thing— Daniel, go get changed."

Purpled, obliges, and turns towards the change room.

Clay sighs again, and he sounds rather tired about the entire situation. Which... fair, big mood for the Tommy community.

"So, we could tighten up the pant legs and the sleeves and the torso. But I think that would make you too uncomfortable."

Tommy stares at Clay for a moment. “So. It’s good as it is?”

“I believe so,” Clay says slowly, squinting slightly at Tommy. “It gives you more movement, and you and Daniel both appear to rate clothes in how well you can fight for your lives in, rather than how good they look.”

Which... accurate.

Clay sighs and leans against the wall, “That’s you done then Tommy. We can sell that straight to you, if that’s what you want. Daniel’s and the other’s will be delivered to the tower in a couple of days.”

“Oh!” Tommy says, blinking a few times. “Cool, thank you.”

“Get changed,” Clay says. “After Daniel of course.”

So Tommy does that, reliving being back in his hoodie and jeans and knowing exactly how much they cost and therefore not being afraid to break them. (They were free, Ranboo stole them two years back.)

He emerges from the ‘store-room’ situation, and Clay follows after Purpled and him.

Clay folds the suit while walking (which is impressive.) He grabs a button up shirt from the rack and also folds that with the suit before shoving it all in a bag and smiling brightly. He hands the bag straight to Tommy.

Tommy gives a grateful but slightly awkward smile.

Wilbur's done apparently, because he's leaning against the wall talking to one of the shop owners. Tommy can see that he's turned up his accent and that he's speaking more with his hands than he normally does.

Purpled nods approvingly next to him.

"What's he doing?"

"Accent changing," Purpled says, "Similar to me, he's just making it more apparent. Talking with his hands more, which is an Upper L'Manberg thing. He's pretty good at that, he's more chill around Techno and you."

"Huh?"

"Notice next time they're talkin'," Purpled explains. "Wilbur almost drops the accent completely. And Wilbur doesn't move his hands as much. Notice how you and I have our hands in our pockets, and Wilbur doesn't."

"You scare me."

"Psychology," Purpled explains, "Techno's a fun one to analyse. Mostly Logstedchire gestures, but there's enough Upper ones too. He has the beginnings of an accent. Tubbo's also fun to watch, it's a mess."

"Huh?"

"He keeps getting his languages mixed up," Purpled explains with approximately zero hesitation. "Let alone accents. Similar to me though. He watches his body language, he knows that everything says something."

"Why do you analyse us like this?"

“Habit.”

Tommy pulls a face.

Wilbur notices Tommy and he pushes off the wall, “Ayo, Tommy.”

“Ayup. Wilbur.”

Wilbur nods his head. “Toms.”

“Wilbs.”

“No—”

“Wilby—”

“No way on Earth.”

“Wilby!” Tommy yells with a grin, he flings an arm around Wilbur’s shoulders (shut up he stands on his tip toes.) Wilbur freezes for a split second, “We’re like brothers—”

“Don’t even—” Wilbur says, trying to brush Tommy’s arm off, it’s not that effective and Tommy just laughs. “If I was related to you, I’d throw myself out a window.”

“If I was related to you—” Tommy starts, “I’d kick you off a roof.”

“I do that once! And I never hear the end of it!”

Tommy laughs.

Yeah. Someone kicks you off a roof *one time* and somehow they’re the bad guy.

Eventually everyone else finishes with their suit business. He knows this because Techno looks grumpy about the entire thing. He glares at Wilbur when Wilbur gives him a bright (and sarcastic) smile.

Techno flips him off. “I would punch you, but that’ll shatter all your weak ass bones.”

“Okay, don’t insult my bones like that—”

“They’re fragile,” Techno mutters. “If I high-fived you too hard you’d snap.”

“I have strong bones,” Tommy adds for no reason.

“I don’t doubt it,” Techno rolls his eyes.

“Okay— are you doubting the strength of my bones?”

“Yes.” Purpled and Techno deadpan together.

Tommy huffs and looks down.

Eventually everyone’s done and everything’s paid for.

They start walking down the street. Wilbur, Fundy and Niki are in some intense conversation about something. He knows it's intense because Wilbur's using his hands and Fundy is bouncing on the balls of his feet as he walks.

Tommy's not really listening. Quackity and Purpled are talking, and by that he means Quackity is talking and Purpled is nodding and adding a couple of words

Techno and Dream are talking, Tommy has been listening. Something about training drills and learning how to control Techno's new strength.

It's quiet, and it feels relaxing.

The street is pretty quiet, there are some school children walking around and laughing. One of them pauses, before looking at the group of them. They say something to their friends and then they all look at them.

"Hey!" Someone yells, and Tommy looks over.

A group of children cross the road.

Wilbur pauses, and looks over his shoulder. Tommy puts his head down and goes to keep walking, before Purpled grabs his wrist and yanks him back.

Tommy glares at Purpled.

Purpled glares back.

The group of kids walk up to them. Most of them look like teenagers, but one of them, who looks a lot younger. (A sibling maybe?) Has the courage to step forwards and look at all of

them.

“Are you—” one of the kids start. They look nervous. Shifting from foot to foot, which is fair enough, Tommy is often the same (much to everyone’s disgust.) They have brown hair, and are rather short.

The kid takes another deep breath. “Are you the intern, Tommy?”

Tommy looks at the kid, blinking a few times. “Yes. I’m— not an intern, but I’m the PR guy. Social media dude—”

The kid looks like the way Tommy used to when someone talked about Philza. Their eyes brighten and they break into a huge smile.

“You’re so cool!” The kid yells, jumping up and down, they gesture at their friends. “They all like Spectre and Philza, and other basic answers. But you’re so much cooler, you’re funnier! And they’re—” they look nervous for a second. “Mean to people! But you’re mean in a funny way.”

Tommy nods slowly, not sure what to feel exactly.

The kid grins even wider. Their friends are looking at Dream with amazement, and Dream is apparently used to this, because he starts talking to them and Tommy tunes them out for the kid standing in front of him.

“What’s your name?” Tommy asks.

“Elena!” She grins widely, before bouncing up and down a little more. “Do you know who Theseus is?” She whispers. She looks around at the heroes, before back at Tommy. “I know they don’t like him, but I think he’s pretty cool.”

“Yeah?” Tommy says, trying to ignore the tears. He crouches down so they’re both at the same level. “He’s alright, lots of people like him.”

“Yeah!” Elena says with a huge smile. “My sister is deaf— and she loves Theseus! If I tell her I met you—”

Tommy smiles slightly, “Yeah?”

“Yeah!” Elena grins, “Theseus is so cool! He knows sign language!”

“He does!” Tommy nods.

“Do you know sign language?”

“Mhmm.”

Elena gasps, “Really?”

“Yeah.”

Elena grins a bit wider. “Do you know who Theseus is?”

And... she looks like she’s seen the stars. She looks the way children should look, filled with wonder and amazement, with complete and utter hero worship that will fade over time. And Tommy doesn’t have the heart to lie to that.

Tommy gestures to her to move closer, so others don’t hear.

He doesn't care if they're having a loud conversation with the teenagers, he doesn't want to risk anything.

"You can't tell anyone," Tommy says quietly, "I get in a lot of trouble if you tell anyone. Okay?"

Elena nods.

"I know Theseus," Tommy says and Elena's eyes go wide. "I've known him for a while too, since before he was called Theseus."

"Woah!"

"Yeah." Tommy laughs.

"Is he nice?" Elena asks.

Tommy hesitates. How does one answer questions about themselves? Tommy blinks a few times, before shrugging a shoulder. "Depends. Lots of people think he's nice, some people don't."

Elena nods, eyes filled with trust.

She pauses, looking down at her feet. "Does he get scared?"

"Hmm?"

"Because— Mama says that heroes don't get scared. And heroes eat their vegetables and they listen to their parents."

Tommy laughs, “Theseus isn’t a hero.”

“He is to me.”

And somehow Tommy doesn’t break out into tears right there, instead he just nods and gives a slightly sad smile.

“Well she’s right,” Tommy says, glancing at Wilbur who’s talking and laughing. “Heroes eat their vegetables—”

He can remember Wilbur having a tantrum over pumpkin.

“And they listen to their parents—”

Tommy can think of several times that Techno and Wilbur ignore Phil. Most of the heroes are orphans anyway— it’s hard to listen to parents when you don’t have any.

“But they do get scared,” Tommy whispers, his voice breaking slightly. “They get *so* scared.”

He thinks of falling, of being left behind— he thinks of red flashes he couldn’t control and times when he was shaking so badly that he could barely stand.

Elena nods, like the stars are in her eyes. “Thank you.” She whispers.

Tommy nods his head.

She smiles at Tommy, “For what it’s worth. I think Theseus is way cooler than all the heroes! And if you’re helping him, that’s also cool.”

Tommy nods and stands up, not sure if he’ll break out into tears if he tries to speak for much longer.

He needs an out.

Remove himself from the situation—

There’s a diner just down the street.

Tommy looks at Elena and gives a smile, before seeing everyone else is busy signing things or talking or doing whatever the fuck they do—

He starts down the street.

Before turning into the diner.

It’s a nice little thing, with red seats and the black and white checkered floor. It’s not too busy either, he scans everyone for anything of interest—

Is that Tubbo?

And Ranboo?

Why the fuck are they here?

“We can’t—” Ranboo says.

“Ranboo?” Tommy says, taking a couple steps forward.

Tubbo jumps around hand clenched around a butter knife and he blinks at Tommy a few times. “Oh. Hey Tommy,” Tubbo smiles slightly. “W—what are you doing here? Aren’t you suit shopping?”

“I needed a moment, they got mobbed.”

“Ah.” Ranboo nods. He shuffles over and Tommy takes a seat next to Ranboo, he rests his head on the table and stays there. Some of the papers are moved about, but Tommy couldn't care less if he tried.

He sheds some tears, not many. But some.

He rubs at his eyes, before sitting up.

Tubbo’s looking at Tommy, his eyes all concerned and shit. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah—” Tommy nods. “I’m— fine. I will be— it’s just. Yeah.”

“Yeah?”

Tommy takes a deep breath, really thinking about it. “I’ll be fine.”

The door opens and Techno pokes his head in. He steps in, wiping his feet on the doormat before walking up to the table. He looks at Tommy, then at Ranboo and Tubbo.

He looks at Tubbo, “Shove over.”

“What?” Tubbo says, “This isn’t your seat.”

“I lost my emotional support extrovert,” Techno explains. He shoves Tubbo over and Tubbo glares. Tubbo rolls his eyes, but shuffles over a bit more. “Have you eaten today, Tommy?”

Tommy glares slightly. “We’re at a diner, can’t eat meat, asshole.”

“You can,” Tubbo adds slowly.

“Can not,” Tommy snaps and Tubbo raises his eyebrows. He gives a *‘bro what the fuck?’* Look.

Techno rolls his eyes, “They have vegetarian options. What do ya want?”

“Burger.”

“Look at the menu,” Techno says, throwing a menu that had been put aside at Tommy.

Tommy picks it up and glares, “I can order myself—”

“You don’t have to,” Techno says, before looking at Tubbo and Ranboo. “You two want anything? My shout.”

“Onion rings,” Tubbo says brightly. “In fact. Two onion rings. And another burger. Boo, you want anything?”

“Uh...” Ranboo looks nervously down at his hands and Tommy can see Techno’s expression soften slightly. His eyes dart to one of the menus, where it rests on the cheeseburger part of the menu for a second too long. “I’m good thanks,” Ranboo says and gives a fake smile.

Techno nods, and turns around.

When Techno returns, he returns with three onion ring baskets. Four burgers and two baskets of fries.

He puts them down on the table, pushing two of the onion rings to Tubbo and the fries and other onion rings to Tommy. He also pushes over a burger to Tommy, before sitting down next to Tubbo.

Tubbo looks at Techno, eyes wide. “I didn’t actually think you would.”

Techno shrugs and bites into his burger. “It’s not like I don’t have enough disposable income. Also it’s an apology for everyone interrupting your peaceful meal—”

“Everyone?” Tubbo says slowly, “What do you mean—”

The door opens, Tommy hears it open and he hears the group of people who he doesn’t really want to be here. Walking in. Tommy sighs and puts his head against the table. This is a four person table.

Wilbur walks over to them. “Oi Tech, shove over.”

“What? No?”

Somehow Wilbur manages to find a way to sit at the bench. Which does have a lot to do with squishing Tubbo between the window and Techno, and Tubbo glares at Wilbur the entire time.

Purpled sits next to Tommy.

It's significantly less squishy on this side. This probably has a lot to do with the fact none of them have very broad shoulders. Tommy huffs and eats his burger silently, as he's shoved over so he's pressed between Ranboo and Purpled and Niki's sitting at the end of the bench.

This is supposed to sit four people.

Not seven.

Dream pulls up two chairs on the side of the table that isn't against the wall. Quackity and him sit down.

Well. Apparently they can fit nine people at this four-person table.

The more you know.

So they... eat. Is the only word for it.

Tubbo chows down on his onion ring, and everyone who does have food goes to get some. Which leads to a funny sight of them trying to find space for anything.

Purpled leans slightly closer to Tommy, "Tubbo and Quackity," he whispers, it's barely a whisper and Tommy wouldn't have thought he heard it if Purpled hadn't moved closer.

Thankfully it's covered up by the sound of Dream and Wilbur arguing.

He glances between Quackity and Tubbo. Neither of them are talking, in fact both of them seem to be very focused on their own food. Which Tommy gets, but Tubbo's quite a talkative person.

So's Quackity.

"Tubbster," Tommy drawls, and Tubbo looks up like he's been shocked. "Have some of my burger, does it taste funky to you?"

Tommy pushes his burger across the table.

Tubbo goes to grab it—

Purpled yunks it and takes a bite out of it, before passing it to Tubbo.

Tubbo also takes a bite out of it and screws up his nose.

"Ew!" Tubbo exclaims, passing it to Ranboo who also takes a bite and spits it out. "What even is that?"

Quackity's phone buzzes, and he looks at it. Before sighing slightly.

"I really gotta go—"

"Huh?" Wilbur says, "You said you were free today—"

Dream shrugs.

Quackity says another apology, before pushing his chair back in (which is rather polite) and essentially sprinting out the door.

Everyone looks at each other.

“I feel like we should look into that,” Techno deadpans.

“I mean Quackity is pretty shady—” Tubbo mutters into his burger.

Everyone looks at him.

Tubbo looks up, feigning innocence. “Did someone say something?”

“What the fuck do you know about Quackity?” Wilbur asks slowly, “You’re what... a child?”

Tubbo shrugs, “Heard stuff— y’know how it is.”

Tommy does not know how it is. Instead he looks at Techno and pulls a face. Techno pulls a face back, he looks a bit like a constipated duck, but that’s okay. Because so do the best people—

“So,” Tommy says, leaning back into his chair. “Things.”

“Things indeed,” Purpled adds. “Let’s talk about vigilantes! They’re fun!”

Wilbur groans, hitting his head against the table.

“Can we not?” Wilbur asks weakly.

“No, we gotta,” Dream says with a shrug. “I don’t make the rules, apart from when I do. I really like Theseus.”

“Fucking everybody does,” Wilbur mutters.

They all promptly ignore him.

There’s something funny about that, something that makes Tommy want to flip Wilbur off and yell at him. Because *FUCK YOU BITCHHHH*. But he’s a mature person who doesn’t really want his cover blown.

So he stays cool, calm and collected.

“I mean, his PR work is amazing. Rivals Tommy’s— it’s hard to get people to like you. And his powers are so interesting— how do they work? What are they really?”

“Files say telekinesis,” Techno deadpans, “Whether that’s true or not.”

“But it’s glowy shit,” Tubbo adds, “Surely telekinesis doesn’t have any glowy spark shit?”

Wilbur hits his head against the table.

Techno hits him in the shoulder. “This isn’t about you. You gotta admit his powers are cool.”

“So is fucking—” he cuts himself off, looking a bit sadder. “Other powers are just as cool. Healing? Messing with memories—”

“In theory Theseus can do that—” Dream adds.

“Huh?” Tommy asks.

“Well,” Dream explains, “If he’s right about it being energy manipulation. Which seems unlikely, but memories are energy, they’re the way electricity goes through your brain in a certain pattern. So in theory, if you can manipulate that electricity in their brain, you can fuck with memories. And mind control!”

“Woah,” Tubbo breaths, “That’s so cool.”

“Unlikely though,” Dream adds. “We haven’t seen him able to control electricity— if he could though.” Dream laughs. “If he could, we’re fucked.”

Everyone laughs, Niki grins a bit wider.

“Too bad Quackity isn’t here,” Niki says, her voice is soft but filled with a little bit of mirth. A bit of something there that makes Tommy smile slightly. “Or else Floof would scare him.”

Again, everyone laughs.

And hey. It’s nice.

Tommy decides.

If life is always this easy, then it’ll be great.

For now he can ignore the gala looming in the distance, and the information he'll need to get. Because right now he's eating burgers with his friends. Right now, he's having a great time.

And very little will ruin it.

Techno looks at him, concern in his eyes. *"You okay?"* Techno mouths.

Tommy nods.

He is.

So why does it feel like a lie?

Chapter End Notes

Summary:

Wilbur thinks Theseus is stealing their Wi-Fi. Techno & him have an emotional support moment and bond, Tommy decides he'll go to the charity gala to get information to try and get revenge for Techno.

Purpled wants to move in and Tommy is like "yeah dope." They go suit shopping, that's fun. They meet Clay! They go onto the street, and Tommy meets this sweet kid who's all like "Theseus is my hero!" And Tommy cries, before running into a diner where he sees Tubbo & Ranboo.

Everyone chills. Boom the end. (I wrote this in a hurry, sorry.)



This chapter's meme drawn by [Cait](#), (the beloved) which is hilarious. So thank you!

Okay so, we have a bunch of art! (Thank you all so much), again none of this is mine and instead belong to the lovely people of discord.

This drawing of [the Niki & Techno interaction](#) last chapter by [Cheddar](#)! It's so funny and made me laugh very hard when I first saw it!

[THIS THESEUS DESIGN](#) AEUWHDSZJN /pos by [Orpheus](#), it's so cool! And almost exactly what I have in mind when I write Theseus's outfit descriptions. I also adore the way the powers are shown like lightning! It's so cool!

Also this [sketch of Theseus](#) by [ToothyBandit](#), now, they didn't post this on this discord. Instead a friend and I stalked through Twitter and found this really cool sketch, so thank you!

We also have this [drawing of Floof](#) by Ven! Which is so chaotic and funny and I adore so much! It's so funny and gets his vibe perfectly. It's amazing, thank you so much!

We alssooo have these hilarious drawings by Pixel, which are so funny. Like just look at

them. We have [Wilbur](#), [Tommy](#), [Techno](#) and [Phil](#). I really love Phil's stance for a reason I can't articulate.

Then we have these two neat pieces by Arson, [Tommy having stolen Wilbur's jumper](#), and what [civilian Tommy](#) probably wears. We also have these two really cute drawings of Tommy. [Chaotic Tommy](#), and [Tommy and Floof cuddling](#).

We also have this [drawing of Purpled & Tommy](#) by Aza, this is also very close to how I write Theseus's outfit description and I love it so much. (So any artists, this is basically canon.) It's just so neat, so thank you so much!

All the art is so cool, and thank you so much!

Join the [discord](#), it's super fun!

and [follow me on twitter](#). Ig.

In Which There is That Time Things Don't Go Great

Chapter Summary

things don't go great tbh. it's in the title of the chapter.

Chapter Notes

HI. WELCOME TO A 17K WORD CHAPTER. HOPE THE WAIT WAS WORTH IT.

Warnings: explosions, guns, blood, general violence, major injury, alcohol

Summary at the end as always, take care of yourself. This one is rougher than what we've had for a while.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"So, you're gonna turn at the left after the second door," Tubbo looks at his computer, humming. "Then you're there, plug the hard drive in. Let everything search and download, that'll also give me a backdoor entrance, and I can do what I want."

Tommy just blinks.

"Got it?" Tubbo says.

"That's a lot to memorise in a few hours."

Tubbo takes a deep breath. "I had to put together a harddrive that can get into the country's most secure servers. In *a day*. "

"It was more than that—"

“You give me a day!” Tubbo yells, “To put this together? You didn’t think to tell me beforehand that you needed a drive—”

“I don’t even need it!” Tommy replies, folding the washing angrily. “I told you, just search for the keywords—”

Tubbo glares. “What would those fucking keywords be? We’re looking for Ranboo’s files.”

“Why the fuck are we looking for Ranboo’s files?” Tommy yells.

“Because,” Tubbo replies with gritted teeth. “It will have a place of employment on it, then it’ll have the date he went missing.”

“So?”

Tubbo groans. “Whatever is on the employment part... that’s what we look at, that’s an accompanying... well company, that is working. Then we start going through like that.”

Tommy looks up from bundling up his socks. “So why can’t I just go through it? Why do you need to get into the system?”

Tubbo glares. “Tommy. What did we say about questioning my logic—”

“Not to do it.”

“And what are you doing?”

“Questioning your logic,” Tommy mumbles, balling up another pair of socks before glancing at the closed door where he can hear Purpled swearing at Mario Kart and Ranboo absolutely winning. It seems... a bit like a crime. “Oi! Dickheads, I did your fuckin’ laundry.”

There’s shuffling. Purpled flings open the door and pokes his head out. “What do you want, fuckface?”

“For you to put your fuckin’ laundry away,” Tommy scowls.

“I put your laundry away!” Purpled complains, “Fuck off, I’m playing a game with Ranboo —” he goes to close the door.

Tommy lifts a pillow off the couch and throws it across the room, red energy guiding it there. Where it makes a noise worth every bit of effort and then more. Purpled glares at Tommy, pure hatred in his eyes.

“You dick!” Purpled shrieks, picking up the closest item to him. Which happened to be the knife that Purpled always carried on his person. “If I stabbed you, it would be *so* worth it.”

“Fuckin’ do it, prick,” Tommy shoots back, “Did it before—”

“*I* didn’t stab you!” Purpled yells back, “They grabbed my arm.”

“You were holding the knife!”

“It was just in the arm anyway! You’ve had worse!”

Tubbo whistles, looking up from his laptop. “Fuckin’ hell, I forgot you two were like this. Purps, for someone who parades about having not emotions, you speak to Tommy once and then you’re more worked up then Tommy on a regular basis.”

“He’s a fucking parasite.”

“He’s a brother,” Tubbo deadpans.

“Well I fuckin’ want a new one!” Tommy yells, before throwing a pair of socks at Purpled who catches them easily.

Purpled glares, “I will kick you off a roof.”

“Not funny!” Tommy laughs, “I have *trauma* and shit from that. I will have a breakdown.”

“Not the first time,” Purpled mutters.

“Oi! I am a big man who never cries!” Tommy screeches.

The apartment falls quiet at that.

“Okay...” Tommy says slowly, “I’ll admit, that last bit isn’t true. But shut up, just because I have like a few breakdowns—”

“A few?” Ranboo adds, stepping out into the main area.

Tubbo sighs, “Fuckin’ hell, we were supposed to get Tommy therapy. Boo, did you get Tommy therapy?”

“I have been busy, *Tobias*. ”

“Okay then *Rathaniel* .”

Tommy sighs and looks at Purpled. “People these days,” he mutters and Purpled nods before rolling his eyes slightly. It’s *almost* funny but not quite.

Purpled huffs before settling down on the couch next to Tommy, “Tell us about your emotions, Toms.”

Tommy screws up his nose and looks at Purpled, mouth open slightly. “What?”

“What are you feeling?” Purpled puts his feet up on the coffee table. “Tubbo, how have you been feeling lately?”

Tubbo looks up from his laptop and screws up his nose. “Ah. Slightly anxious, kinda terrified my past will catch up, but... I don’t think it will. Also stressed about the gala thing and trying to get this thing done for Tommy, on top of my school work and— ah shit applications for the summer internship are due.”

“There’s a summer internship?” Purpled asks.

“Mhmm.” Ranboo hums, “Something about getting to meet Vulcan?”

Tubbo grins, “You got it big man! Hey... Tommy who is my best friend in the entire world ___”

“I’ll put in a good word,” Tommy sighs and rolls his eyes. “Boob boy—”

“Please don’t call me that—”

“How have you been feeling?”

Ranboo shrugs one shoulder and runs a hand through his hair, “Good. Been feeling good apart from that nightmare stint from... before the warehouse. Grades are good, friends are good, not gonna get fired from my job. Things are good.”

Tommy rolls his eyes and sinks down on the couch.

Everyone looks at him.

“Do I have to share?” Tommy mutters, “Purpled hasn’t shared!”

Purpled rolls his eyes, “Fine. I’m good. I’m safe and I’m warm, slightly anxious about the charity gala and the fact you still don’t have a tie. Uh... yeah I wasn’t thinking about much else until you mentioned it and now I’m slightly stressed about this client thing, and a job I was offered but turned down—”

“Wait, what?”

“It was to set up like... a bomb sorta situation? The negotiations didn’t get further than that ___”

Tommy pauses, “Like... at the gala?”

Purpled shakes his head, “There’s no way— they can’t create anything that quick. I was offered the job earlier today... but yeah, maybe we should be concerned.”

“Maybe?” Tommy squeaks. “Do you forget I worked for heroes, and blowing up heroes is a great way to—”

“You’re avoiding the topic—”

“Fine,” Tommy mutters, he sighs, trying to get his thoughts together. “Uh— I’m feeling fine. Slightly nervous about the gala, but it’ll be fine. My powers are getting better, so that’s fun for me.”

Purpled gives him a look. “That *can not* be all that’s going on in your head.”

“Basically is— I have a couple of deadlines and— eh, I’m good.”

Tubbo and Ranboo glance at each other.

Tommy sighs, “Don’t even.”

“Tommy, we’re worried—”

“Fucking everyone is worried about me!” Tommy yells, he looks between Purpled, Ranboo and Tubbo. “I am *fine*. Nothing is going wrong, everything’s great. Wilbur tolerates my existence as Theseus, Techno doesn’t hate me and— well we’re working on Phil.”

“Okay, okay,” Ranboo says carefully. “We’re not accusing you of anything. We’re just concerned. We’re allowed to be concerned about you— you’re our friend. This isn’t pity, this is just us caring.”

Tommy glares. “You’re doing that thing.”

“What thing?”

“The thing when you think I’m fourteen again, and can’t accept any sort of kindness directed at me.”

“Can you?” Ranboo challenges.

Tommy turns around, “Why do you have a backbone?”

“Why are you deflecting?”

“I’m literally—” Tommy scowls. “I am fine. Ranboo.”

“Okay,” Purpled says, being the tactical man that he is never. “Can we not, Tommy. You have a suit to put on. How long until Wilbur is here?”

“Uh,” Tommy glances at his phone. “Like five minutes.”

“Get dressed,” Purpled says, throwing a pillow at him.

Tommy sighs, but does. He throws the pillow back, before trudging into his room. Glaring slightly... for no reason apart from him being filled with rage. He slams the door shut, before picking up the suit. The suit is... fine.

It fits well enough, well that’s what the suit person said. He pulls the blazer on and sighs. Mostly at himself but not completely. Before adjusting it, he glances in the mirror that Purpled brought when he moved. His hair is... pretty fluffy, but it looks okay. If he even attempted to do anything else to it then it would be worse.

He’ll take it.

Purpled is in his suit. Because he's a weirdo who looks far more comfortable in a suit than Tommy. He has a white shirt on underneath, with a black tie. Then the purple suit, which is more a purple-greyish colour but it looks good enough.

Ranboo is sulking in the kitchen.

Good.

Tommy is also sulking, he didn't want to be completely alone with the entire sulking part. He glares at nothing in particular, because he's a simple man who just glares a lot. Ranboo glares at Tommy, Tommy just looks at him.

"If I get shot, you're going to be upset the last thing we did was argued."

"You won't get shot," Tubbo says.

"Okay. If I get injured."

"I hope you stub your toe," Ranboo crosses his arms and sinks down against the counters more. "I hope that you—"

"Okay," Purpled says, putting a hand on Tommy's shoulder. "Both of you need to chill. I can not believe that I am saying that. You need to relax, Tommy will talk when he's ready and Ranboo isn't in the wrong for caring about you Tommy."

Tommy pouts.

Ranboo mutters something under his breath and turns to Tubbo.

“I can not believe I am the responsible adult,” Tubbo mutters, “Ranboo, you can’t force Tommy to speak. Tommy, don’t be a prick to Ranboo he just has your best interests at heart. He cares about you asshole, and that isn’t a crime.” Tubbo sighs and looks at Purpled, “Is this what parents do?”

“I think so,” Purpled returns with a deep sigh. “You lot exhaust me. Tommy have ya got everything?”

“Yeah.”

“Phone?”

“Yes.”

“Water?”

“At the venue, or the tower if needed.”

“Some self preservation skills? Just some.”

“Nah.”

Purpled groans.

Tommy’s phone buzzes and he picks it up.

Wannabe Theatre Kid:

Ayo. Get your asses out here.

I will send you cursed images. This is a threat.

Random Philza Stan:

i am aware.

down in a sec.

Tommy starts down the stairs, Purpled following after him. Tommy skips over the last stair and walks up to the ever-familiar Wilbur car. It's getting just a little bit more familiar now, and Tommy likes the car a lot.

He also likes the McDonald's wrappers on the floor as Tommy jumps in the front.

Wilbur gives him a look. "You don't get to sit in the front."

"Why not?"

Wilbur doesn't have a reason. They both know it. It's really a battle of wills, and who the fuck is going to give up first. Tommy does not give up easily. Wilbur sighs and checks over his shoulder at Purpled.

Purpled is just sitting there with his belt on. He's on his phone, but Tommy knows that the prick is listening to everything they say and analysing it. Tones, how they're holding themselves. The list can go on. And on, and on.

Wilbur starts driving, and Tommy puts his feet up on the dashboard.

Wilbur glares. "Put your feet down."

"No."

“Thomas Underscore.”

“Wilbur Soot.”

“If I crash you’ll fucking break both of your knees.”

“Seems like a you problem.”

“Put your feet down, Tommy,” Purpled says.

Tommy puts his feet down. Okay he’s not exactly happy about it, but he’s pretty sure he’ll make it through this terrible day.

“Thank you, Daniel.”

Purpled nods and looks back at his phone. He’s scowling slightly at it, like the phone has somehow wronged him. Which is funny, because a lesser person would think that Purpled is texting Tubbo, or Ranboo or talking to a client. Or... whatever Purpled does.

But no. Tommy knows that he’s playing Subway Surfers, and he’s not doing it very well considering the scowl on his face.

Tommy kicks the McDonald’s bag by his feet. “When d’ya get McDonald’s?”

“Yesterday, with Tech,” Wilbur replies, eyes still on the road like a responsible driver. “We hung out, it’s been a hot second since we have.”

“I thought you had family dinners?”

“Just Tech and I, idiot,” Wilbur says, but Tommy can hear the fondness in his voice as clear as day. “Sometimes you gotta hang out with your brother. A lot has happened in our life since last time, so we just talked.”

“Oh. Sounds like fun.”

Wilbur nods.

Tommy turns around. “Why do we never get McDonald’s and talk?”

Purpled looks up from his phone with a glare. “Because I fucking hate you.”

“That is simply not the truth.”

“It simply is.”

“Fuck off.”

“We live together, asshole,” Purpled says without missing a beat. “We fuckin’ talk all the time.”

Tommy crosses his arms and scowls out the window.

The car ride is mostly silent from there out, with the radio and some mindless chatter in between. Wilbur drives like a sane man. (Tommy thanks every deity he can possibly fucking think of. It’s not... that many.)

Wilbur hums along to the songs, Purpled plays Subway Surfers intensely and Tommy texts the group chat memes. He knows that they're pretty good because every now and again Purpled snorts and shakes his head fondly.

They eventually get to the tower, and Tommy clambers out.

Purpled clambers out too.

Wilbur looks at Tommy. "Where's the tie?"

"Huh?"

"The—" Wilbur sighs. "You weren't given a tie?"

"No?"

"Fuck me," Wilbur says, "We are fixing that straight away. Fuck. There's not much that's gonna work with. Okay I can figure this out." He shakes his head, and starts walking towards the tower.

Wilbur mutters under his breath and Tommy gives Purpled a nervous look.

"Fuckin' no tie, you're gonna look like a fuckin' waiter."

"Is there a reason he's dropping the 'g' off his words?"

Purpled nods, “Techno— you. You pick up the little habits of the people you’re around, I do the same. Phil also drops the last letter more than most people from Upper L’Manberg. Bit of all of those.”

“Fuckin’— fuck,” Wilbur says opening the door. He flashes his pass at security and Tommy runs to stick close because he did not bring his pass. Not even slightly. Purpled nods at the guards, and the guards nod back.

Kristin looks up from the desk, “Wil— I was about to clock off, you alright?”

“They didn’t give Tommy a tie!” Wilbur yells to the roof. “Do you know how fuckin’ stupid that is, he’ll look like a waiter. And a maroon suit jacket, this is gonna be a nightmare to match. Tommy drop the jacket.”

“I like the jacket.”

Wilbur turns around and looks at Tommy. “Tommy, drop the fuckin’ jacket.”

“What if I don’t,” Tommy challenges, a slight grin on his face. “Then what?”

Wilbur glares, “You are the worst, child. Fuckin’ no tie, what sort of insane person— I’m going to get them fired—”

“Karenbur,” Purpled mutters, leaning over to Tommy and Tommy wheezes with laughter. “Wil,” Purpled says, hands in the air, looking like he’s trying to calm Wilbur down and... yeah he probably is. “Chill, doesn’t really matter. I know they have ties here, chill.”

Wilbur takes a deep breath, “Okay. You’re right, I’m calm— TECHNO FUCKING BLADE WHAT ARE YOU DOING?”

Techno looks up at him. He looks pretty good, for someone who normally wears some form of hoodie. He's wearing a white dress shirt and black pants, on top of that is a black waistcoat. His tie is red, and he has a slightly darker shade of red for a blazer that he's not wearing properly. Instead is wearing a bit like a cape, which is very on brand.

He looks alright.

Tommy can't see the problem.

"Huh?" Techno says, "What's up?"

"Your sleeves?" Wilbur says, "Why the fuck are they rolled up?"

Techno looks down at his sleeves, which sure enough are rolled up. Huh. Techno appears to think about the same because his face screws up and looks back up at Wilbur. "What's wrong with that?"

"You don't do that?" Wilbur yells, "Fuckin' unroll the sleeves or I am going to... do something."

Techno gives him a look.

Wilbur glares. "Also put the blazer on you heathen."

Techno just shrugs, before looking back down and shrugging. (Yet again.) "I think I look good. You are simply... wrong."

"You look like a wanna-be."

“I look good,” Techno shrugs, “Like the outfit Daniel.”

Purpled gives a small polite smile. “Thank you! Yours looks pretty nice.”

Wilbur screeches.

He picks up a pillow from the couch in the lobby, and starts swinging it at Techno. Techno ducks them easily. Before picking up the pillow, yanking it out of Wilbur’s hands and hitting him in the stomach.

“Fucker.”

Techno shrugs, “Tommy... your outfit gives me mixed emotions. If you dropped the blazer you’d look like a waiter.”

Tommy nods slowly.

Techno gives him a look.

Wilbur sighs, “Fuckin’ hell, Tommy come with me. Daniel and Techno you two stay down here and chat.”

Purpled looks at Tommy, panic in his eyes.

For what it’s worth, Techno does the exact same.

“I’m not great at conversation—” Purpled starts.

Wilbur turns around, and walks towards the elevator.

Tommy flips them both off, and follows.

The betrayal in their eyes... is worth everything.

They both stand in the elevator. Neither of them pressing the button.

Tommy crosses his arms and stares.

They have a glaring competition for a long moment.

“Fine,” Wilbur mutters, moving over to the elevator and hitting the buttons.

Techno crosses his arm and looks at Tommy’s friend.

Techno doesn’t know much about Daniel, but what he does know is that he’s hiding something. Almost certainly knows that Tommy is a vigilante... and might be one himself. Techno hasn’t thought about it much more.

“So...” Daniel says, “Yeah.”

“Mhmm,” Techno nods. Crossing his arms a bit tighter. “How’s the weather in Logstedchire?”

“You also live in Logstedchire,” Daniel deadpans.

They fall silent again.

Techno shifts from leg to leg.

What the fuck is he supposed to talk about to a child? Tommy is... well Tommy, he's easy to talk to.

This child is... not.

Techno snifts again. "What do you do for fun?"

"Nothing."

"Okay then."

Silence again.

Okay Techno is bad at conversations, but he's not *this* bad at them typically.

Okay sometimes he is. But normally the other person gives him something.

Silence.

Right. This is going well.

Wilbur sighs and throws himself onto the couch dramatically. He's surrounded by ties, but he insists that none of them are *right*. Tommy thinks they're all fine. Wilbur sighs dramatically, he holds another tie up.

He hums. "Wait a second, Techno has a red tie, right?"

"Yeah?"

Wilbur scrambles from off the couch, throwing some ties around before grabbing a red one. It appears to be the same one as Techno's. But Tommy can't tell colours that well, Wilbur grins. Holding it against Tommy's chest.

He nods to himself, before handing the tie to Tommy.

Tommy stares at the tie, then up at Wilbur and glancing back at the tie. "Uh."

Wilbur gives him a look, "You good?"

"Well..." Tommy shuffles on his feet. "Just say. If I didn't know how to tie a tie, which is a lie. In fact I'm the best at tying ties—"

"Give me your tie, you gremlin," he says with fondness. Tommy rolls his eyes and hands the tie to Wilbur.

Wilbur places it around his neck. Wilbur holds the tie, and appears to think for just a moment. He screws up his face, before looking up at the ceiling appearing to be thinking.

"Cross the wide end over the narrow end and pass up through the neck from underneath. Pull down to the left," Wilbur mutters, like he himself is trying to remember. He looks up for a

moment, before looking back down. "Cross over to the right from behind. Pull up towards the neck loop. Feed through the neck and pull down to the right. Cross over to the front to the left and back up through the neck."

Tommy watches Wilbur go through with all the steps, Wilbur's not quite on auto-pilot, but he's not really thinking about it.

"Feed through the front loop that you've just created at the front. Tighten by pulling down on the wide end and sliding the knot with your other hand to adjust." Wilbur pauses, looking at his work. "There. Full Windsor knot. The power knot."

"What the fuck?" Tommy asks, he pulls at the end of the tie and makes a noise as it tightens. "It's too tight, I don't like ties."

Wilbur huffs, and grabs the collar of Tommy's shirt, yanking him forwards. He loosens the tie, before giving Tommy a long look.

Tommy shrugs. "What? Not all of us went to boarding school," he swats at Wilbur and Wilbur catches it with his hand. He sighs again, and just gives Tommy the most deadpan look possible.

Wilbur shakes his head, "Guess they provided me with a stupid ass uniform I had to put on every day."

Tommy looks at the maroon blazer. Too bad he likes the blazer, because that doesn't appear to be an option for him. He sighs and doesn't pick it back up from the couch, instead looking at Wilbur.

Wilbur sighs, "I gotta get dressed. I'll put the ties away, please save Daniel and Tech. I know in my very soul that they're standing there all awkwardly because... that's what they fucking do."

Tommy nods slowly.

He adjusts the tie, and realises it still feels wrong as he steps into the elevator. He holds his breath and shoves his hands into his pockets. He's thankful the pants have pockets at least, he's not too happy about dropping the blazer.

He liked the blazer.

Reaching the bottom floor, the elevator dings and opens. Leaving Purpled and Techno standing there. Neither of them are looking at each other, Purpled is looking at the floor and Techno is looking out the window.

The relief mirrored in their eyes as Tommy walked over. Was everything.

Purpled does what he does best, which is screwing up his nose. "You look like a waiter."

"That... might be useful."

Techno gives Tommy a look. "Tommy, no."

"Tommy, yes."

"I can not express to you," Techno says with a pained expression on his face, "How badly that's going to go."

"It won't go badly," Tommy mutters.

Techno throws his hands up in the air. "Everything goes terribly for you Tommy!"

“Not everything—” Tommy cuts himself off at Purpled’s gaze. Okay... maybe Techno has a point. But he won’t admit that.

Techno pinches the bridge of his nose, “It’s like whatever fucked up human that’s incharge of your life—”

“Me?”

“Decides the worst possible outcome for *every* fucking situation,” Techno finishes.

“It doesn’t go that badly,” Tommy mutters looking down at his feet.

“The warehouse?”

“The rooftop with Wilbur?” Purpled adds.

“That one time you acted in your best interests?” Techno adds. He rolls his eyes, “I swear to anything listening. That you are the most main character who has ever main charactered.”

Silence.

Purpled clears his throat.

“That time with Phil.” Purpled says.

Techno nods.

“You know about that?” Tommy screeches.

Techno gives him a look. “I literally... talked to him about it?”

“You were... mad at me?”

Techno sighs and looks up at the roof. “I was... okay I was mad, but I still wanted to make sure that Phil... y’know wasn’t going after you. Still care about you.”

Purpled groans, “We get it, we get it.”

Techno rolls his eyes and crosses his arms. Something in his expression softens... almost for a moment. “You speak like Wil.”

“Huh?”

“In the really old interviews of him, when he was just known as Phil’s kid. His tone is the exact same as yours.”

“Okay?”

Techno shrugs, “Just somethin’ to think about.”

“Odd conversation topic,” Purpled mutters, he stares at the window. “Let’s both make fun of Tommy’s accent.”

“It’s a pretty standard accent.”

“I mean yeah, but it’s funny.”

“My accent is normal,” Tommy mutters.

“Well— wouldn’t go that far,” Techno says.

The elevator door opens, and Tommy knows who it is without even having to look. “Wilbur, they’re making fun of my accent.”

“Good,” Wilbur snorts.

Tommy turns around. Wilbur looks... like Wilbur? He can’t think of another word to use.

Wilbur looks good, (he supposes.) He still has his stupid fucking hair that is slightly too long and sweeps into his face. Not a lot but just enough that it looks like a nightmare to deal with. Tommy’s debating lobbing off his hair.

It’s all in his eyes and shit.

Wilbur is wearing... well he doesn’t know how to describe it. The type of suit probably has a name but Tommy firmly does not know it.

“Double-Breasted, slim fitting,” Purpled mutters.

Tommy looks at him. “What? If you’re gonna try to look rich, you might as well do it right.”

Well... Wilbur’s wearing a double-breasted, slim fitting suit. News to him, but Tommy will take it. It’s a royal blue colour, which is a nice shade of blue. Underneath is a white shirt *and*

what looks like the top of a greyish waistcoat.

Wow. Wilbur is apparently *fancy, fancy*.

Why doesn't Tommy get a waistcoat? He wants a waistcoat.

Wilbur is holding a black waistcoat, he throws it at Tommy. Tommy catches it and stares at the waistcoat. "Put it on," Wilbur says.

Tommy does so. It feels... fine, he supposes. Makes him look like he knows what he's doing slightly more and he tucks the end of the tie into the end of the waistcoat. Like Techno has.

Wilbur also has a yellow tie, it's a nice shade of yellow. Not that sorta piss-yellow, like... a sunflower, it's a good colour.

"Bitch gets a pocket square," Purpled mutters.

Okay then! Wilbur is also apparently feeling really fancy because he has a yellow pocket square. Folded into a triangle.

On his lapel there's a pin, it's an emerald, which has small amounts of gold around it. Tommy glances at Techno.

"Where's your emerald?" Wilbur asks slowly.

Techno gives him a look, before reluctantly pulling a chain out from underneath his shirt and showing a necklace. It has a gold chain, and an emerald hanging on the end of it, he swears under his breath and tucks that back into his shirt.

“You done?” Techno mutters, “Yes I have the stupid fucking emerald.”

“You cried when Phil gave it to you.”

“It’s a symbol of family, *Wilbur*. ” Techno spits, “I was an *orphan*. ”

Wilbur nods, before glancing at Tommy. “Yeah... you were.”

“This feels like an attack,” Tommy says.

Wilbur shrugs and swings an arm around Tommy’s shoulders. Tommy is proud to say that he does not even flinch, instead he shakes off Wilbur’s arm (he tries to do it subtly.) They walk towards the door.

With a grin, Wilbur runs over to the desk where Kristin already looks done. She gives Wilbur a look and Wilbur grins a bit wider.

“Hey, Kristin,” he draws out the words impossibly long.

Techno facepalms

Purpled sighs and adjusts his tie. Tommy would do the same, but he still doesn’t fucking know how this knot works and he doesn’t want to accidentally make it tighter. That is the last thing on his to-do list.

“So,” Wilbur grins, slightly too wide for Tommy’s liking. “How are you?”

“Good...” Kristin says carefully.

“You know who else is good?”

Kristin groans.

“Me!” Wilbur continues. Something about this makes Kristin shocked because she looks at Wilbur with slightly wide eyes. “You know who is about to have an even better day?”

“You?”

“No!” Wilbur yells, slamming his hands on the desk. He’s grinning... very wide.

The elevator dings.

Kristin pales. “Wilbur Soot I swear to—”

“Hi Phil!” Techno says with a grin.

Oh right. Okay, they’re doing that thing where they tag team.

“Phil,” Techno says, walking up to Phil and meeting him in the middle of the lobby. “Could you look after Floof?”

“Huh?”

“Well it’ll probably run later and Floof will be by himself for a while, and he’s slightly co-dependant on people. He is a dog... which is fair enough, but could you please look after him?”

Phil looks at Wilbur then Kristin then back at Techno. “I mean. Yeah? But I’m not returning him at some crazy hour in the morning.”

“He can stay with you... I guess,” Techno mutters. “Where is he?”

Almost on cue, another elevator dings and Floof walks out.

He’s in a little suit. With a jacket and a bowtie and everything.

Techno looks at Floof. “Who put you in clothes, you fuckin’ republican?”

Kristin coos as Floof walks up to Techno. “Awww,” she coos, “Look at you! In your little suit. Hi, Floof.”

“Who the fuck got Floof a suit?” Techno says looking between Phil and Kristin. He appears to be thinking for a moment.

Wilbur shrugs, “I’m too scared of Floof to put him in a suit.”

Techno thinks for a moment or two longer, he actually looks in pain about it. “Dream.” He snaps, before grabbing his phone and aggressively texting for about five seconds. He puts his phone back into his pocket.

“So,” Techno says, “Could you please look after Floof? Take him on a walk maybe...” Techno pauses. “Actually yeah, could you take Kristin with you though.”

“What?” Kristin and Phil say.

“Well,” Techno says, “Last time Phil had Floof. He threw him up into the air and caught him. And I do not need Floof being treated like a baby, he is an attack dog—”

“He’s a therapy dog.”

“Anyway, my *attack dog* needs a responsible adult and we all know that Phil isn’t that. But Floof doesn’t like staying at new places,” he turns around to Kristin, “Please, Kristin. Also Phil probably shouldn’t walk around at dark.”

“He has an attack dog.” Purpled deadpans.

“Kristin,” Techno says again, “Please?” He sighs. “I’ll send you photos of Floof looking angry after a bath.”

“Deal.”

Techno grins and looks at Wilbur.

“Go, go, go!” Wilbur yells and the four of them book it out of the building.

Techno shows his pass this time as they run through the doors, and Purpled nods at one of the guards like they know each other.

They probably do to be honest.

Tommy stands on the footpath first, wheezing for breath.

“And that!” Techno announces, “Is how you do it, *Wilbur*. ”

“Fuck off,” Wilbur groans, “I was getting there.”

“Were you?” Techno asks, and they start walking down the street.

Tommy’s not really sure *where* they’re going but it appears that they’re going somewhere for sure.

Probably City Hall, but Tommy has no clue. “Or were you gonna make them both awkward?” Techno continues.

“I mean...” Purpled adds, “Mutual interests are the easiest way to set up people. And both of them like Floof, tactically it’s a sound solution.”

“You fuckin’ terrify me,” Techno says.

“Good. You could engineer some meetings, you both agree to meet up with Kristin and Phil and then you’re both magically late.”

Tommy sighs, “Yeah but that’s boring, you need for them to have a reason to talk regularly.”

“Like?” Wilbur asks, he drags Techno back from oncoming traffic and like responsible people they wait for cars to zoom past. “They don’t have a lot in common.”

“Horror movies...” Techno mutters, “Kristin loves horror movies and Phil hasn’t seen any.”

Wilbur grins brightly. “Oh we can do *so* much with that, leave that with me.”

They cross the road, the way responsible adults do. And Purpled only jumps over the hood of one car to get to the other side.

“Leave that with me,” Tommy corrects. “Wilbur, you’re great. But neither of them expect this to come from me.”

“They simply do.”

“Leave it with me,” Tommy grins.

Techno sighs. “If you ruin this, I will kill you.”

“Kick me off a building?”

“ONE TIME!” Wilbur throws his hands up in the air. “I do it one time! And suddenly that’s the basis of everyone’s humour about me.”

“What are you gonna do about it?” Purpled asks. He pauses for a moment, “Kick me off a roof?”

Wilbur swears and throws his hands up in the air.

The chatter as they walk to the hall continues, Tommy stays mostly quiet. He doesn’t really have a reason why that is, but Techno does glance at him nervously and Tommy waves his hand.

Purpled and Wilbur apparently get on like a house on fire.

They’re swearing, cussing each other out and then putting on their accents and talking about the best knot in a tie. Techno and Tommy just keep awkwardly looking at each other and then Purpled disagreeing about the Windsor knot.

Tommy... barely knows what they're saying.

Techno looks vaguely confused.

"I understand like half of those words," Tommy whispers.

"You get used to it..." Techno sighs, "Okay not really. But at least I understand most of those words."

"Yeah..."

"Daniel was rich?"

Tommy pauses. That is... a very complex question that he's not quite sure how to answer. He hums and looks at Purpled who is avidly talking about something about suits, Tommy's kinda tuned him out.

Purpled... well wasn't, he's not broke but.

It really is quite complicated.

"Not really," Tommy says. "His guardian was."

"Not a good relationship?"

Tommy laughs, "Nah. Really not good."

Techno snorts, “It’s a bit like that.”

“Yeah, I ‘spose it is.”

“What about you?”

“Huh?”

“What was your relationship with your parents like?”

Tommy looks forward, not bothering to glance at Techno. “Seems a bit personal.”

“I was there when you almost died,” Techno whispers as Wilbur yells something. “I’d like to think we know each other.”

Tommy sighs, looking at Techno. “Okay. What’s your relationship with your parents?”

Techno rolls his eyes, “Yeah. It’s... there. When I got out of the ring I attempted to reach out again. They moved to America. It did not go well.”

“So not good?” Tommy says.

Techno hums. “I have not talked to them in years. They called me a monster... if only they could see me now...” there’s a silence for a moment as both of them stew in Techno’s words. Tommy goes to open his mouth. But Techno gets there before he can. “Yeah. So not great.”

“Huh,” Tommy whispers.

“Your go,” Techno deadpans, “If we’re sharing parental trauma.”

Tommy sighs, “They weren’t... very good parents.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah,” Tommy finishes, “I mean sometimes they cared and that was nice. They would take me to parks and to see movies and go to all of my parent-teacher nights. They weren’t... all that bad, they could’ve been worse.”

Techno hums.

“They scared me sometimes though,” Tommy adds absent-mindedly. “They... would get really fucking scary sometimes. I wasn’t safe there a lot, people always went in and out of the house and I hid wherever I could.”

Techno looks not... pitying, but he looks sad nonetheless.

“Had some cool students lookin’ after me though,” Tommy adds. “And then my parents died, and I was pretty fuckin’ alone.”

Techno looks ahead at Purpled and Wilbur, “The birth certificate... it says you’re nineteen. You’re... clearly not.”

Tommy takes a deep breath, “It’s a dead person’s birth certificate. I was given it when I was six.”

Techno stares. “What?” He whispers.

“The birthday on there is fake, I don’t know my actual birthday. The full name is fake, not the Underscore bit. But the one I had before that,” Tommy sighs slightly.

“What’s your real name?” Techno asks slowly.

“Just Tom,” Tommy says quietly, “Not Thomas. Never has been.”

“Huh.” Techno says.

“Mhmm.”

“Tom... what?”

“Can’t say,” Tommy looks at Purpled who is talking very fast and using his hands. He is almost sure that Purpled has slipped into the slightest of English accents and he can not say why that is.

“That’s fucking ominous.”

“Yup.”

“Are you a spy?”

“No.”

“On the run from the authorities.”

Tommy gives him a look.

Techno deflates, “Okay in my defence I forgot—”

“You forgot?” Tommy repeats.

“Yeah—”

“We’re here,” Wilbur says turning around to face them.

It’s a lovely building that they’re standing in front of, and Tommy is shocked that he hasn’t been here before. Okay he’s not that shocked but for the sake of argument he’s going to say he is.

It’s an older looking building, with light grey stone and decorative bits on it all. There are a pair of stairs leading up to the hall. It also has a clock tower, and a really fucking fancy looking roof. There are lovely windows at the front with stone decoration around them that draw attention to them in the classiest way possible.

On top of all that, it’s much bigger than he expected.

People are on the lawns and stairs and path leading up to the hall. He can hear a lot of talking and laughing, and he’s pretty sure that the group to his left are very drunk but that’s alright.

As long as they stay away from him.

“Woah,” Tommy mutters. He looks at Techno and Techno grins fondly. It’s almost sweet. But Tommy is Tommy, and nothing is sweet. Nothing. Never, not in this country. Tommy grins and looks at Purpled. “Look, look, look.”

Techno nods. “That is... a city hall.”

“Damn,” Tommy says.

Wilbur walks forwards and Tommy follows after him. Purpled moves next to Tommy, and Tommy follows Wilbur. Wilbur looks... slightly too confident and Tommy has mixed feelings about it.

“So,” Wilbur says, glancing over his shoulder. “So you’re gonna stay near Tech or I so we don’t get lost—”

“Flowers!” Tommy says, shoving Wilbur to the side and running up to what looks like a flower stand.

At the stand is a warden hybrid, with the aqua coloured horns and the blue dusting across their nose and cheeks that also gave it away. They smile and look at Tommy, something bright in their eyes.

They were almost concerningly pale, with golden-brown hair and the signature aqua streaks that most warden hybrids have. They smile softly as Tommy looks at the flowers.

He recognises some of them, the carnations, the sunflowers, the lilies and the roses. There’s more there, but Tommy isn’t going to try to figure out what they are based on the petals and stuff. Oh hey, there’s lavender too.

Nice.

“I like the...” Tommy squints at the flowers. They... look odd, “Iris?”

“Yup! That’s the Bearded Iris Superstition,” they say, “But most people call them Obsidian Iris’s,” they explain. “They’re just a really, really dark purple. Because flowers can’t be black, they’re all like hybrids of—”

“Purples and reds,” Tommy finishes, “Sometimes blue but not often.”

“Huh, you know somethin’ about flowers then?” Techno says and Tommy jumps.

“Uh. A bit,” Tommy says slowly. “I like flowers.”

Wilbur narrows his eyes, as does Purpled.

Okay. Probably not good to associate himself with the biggest fucking threat to the heroes at the moment via flowers. But he’s surprisingly okay with it, he highly doubts that they actually think that.

He likes plants, and plants tend to grow well around him. He looks back at the flowers, “So... what are these for?”

“Boutonnière’s,” they say slowly.

Tommy looks at Purpled.

Purpled sighs. “The flowers that go on lapels. Or on the left side of the waistcoat. Can be one flower, can be five. It really, really depends,” Purpled eyes the obsidian irises and lightens up. “Oh those look nice, could I have those?”

“Nope!” The warden hybrid grins. “Sorry they’re only for friends of Apollo.”

“Who’s Apollo?”

“Me.”

“Oh, makes sense,” Tommy nods, “I really like the sunflowers. They’re pretty small, how do you do that?”

“So basically— different varieties. So you have the like huge sunflowers then selective breeding.” Apollo smiles at Tommy, “Really know about flowers, huh?”

“Not really,” Tommy snorts, “Just learnt some things. Used to squat around a florist sometimes, not a lot. I can just recognise them and shit like that.”

“That’s impressive,” Apollo nods. “So what flowers would you like?”

“Ooooh,” Tommy leans over the table, looking at all the flowers. “I think... I want a yellow iris.”

Apollo nods, “Anything else?”

Tommy looks over the counter. He shrugs. “Don’t really care.”

Apollo hums, before looking between Techno and Tommy. “Perhaps a matching yellow rose.”

“Uh,” Techno looks at him. “I mean I don’t really mind—”

Wilbur sighs, “Yes, that would be lovely, thank you.”

Purpled hums and shoves Tommy to the side, not with a lot of force, but enough that Tommy moves out of the way. Tommy laughs and hits Purpled in the shoulder, Purpled responds with a well-timed hit to the side of Tommy’s head, he laughs a bit louder.

“Uh,” he pauses. “What are the purple ones?”

“Hyacinth’s and rhododendrons,” Apollo says slowly. “We also have lavender, if you want it?”

“Nah,” Purpled looks at the hyacinths, they’re purple and apparently suit his theme well enough. He nods and pats his pockets for a wallet or apparently something.

Wilbur sighs and gets out his wallet, “Uh... could I have... something with daisies?”

“You want daisies? A... weed.”

“Yes,” Wilbur deadpans. “Please?”

“Sure,” Apollo says, they look at Tommy and Techno. “You two want anything?”

Tommy goes to shake his head.

“Yeah sure,” Techno says, “We’ll have the matching... yellow roses was it?”

“Mhmm,” Apollo says, “Right.”

They grab several pins before gesturing at the flowers on the table. “Grab the ones you want, try not to stab yourself too much. Okay?”

“Okay,” Tommy mutters, grabbing his pin and his yellow rose. It also has the smallest little white flowers at the bottom, probably to make it look really fancy. But it looks really nice. Techno picks up a matching one and looks at it like it personally offended him.

He looks at Purpled, who already has his little bundle on and Purpled sighs. It lasts a lot longer than it normally does, before Purpled grabs the pin and the flower before holding it to Tommy's waistcoat.

"So basically," Purpled explains, "You stab the pin through the bulk of the flower, then you bring it back through," Tommy assumes he's doing the steps as he explains it, because he steps back and it's on Tommy's black waistcoat. "Those colours are terrible."

Tommy shrugs, before looking back at Techno who also has the same yellow rose on his waistcoat. Tommy grins, "Techno, we're matching."

"I'm not happy about it," Techno mutters, but the way he protects the flower when Wilbur swats at him seems to say otherwise. "At least it means that if you get lost I can ask them to look for a child with a rose."

"Hey!" Tommy yells.

Techno just laughs. "Come on nerd."

So he does that.

The way through is pretty crowded, but Techno appears to break through pretty easily. They file behind him, effectively using him to break the crowd as they enter the building.

There's soft... classical? Music is being played and Tommy just stares around at the entrance hall. It's so fucking pretty, and Tommy smiles slightly as people rush around him.

He almost bumps into someone, but Purpled pulls him out of the way.

Purpled gives him a look, and Tommy gives him a smile in return.

“Tommy!” He hears and spins on his heel. It’s Dream, he’s not wearing his typical superhero mask, but he’s still wearing a face covering over the bottom of his face. Still, Tommy can recognise that terrible hair anywhere.

Tommy manages to navigate the crowd over to Dream.

It appears that Dream has no friends, and Tommy’s okay to try and be the first friend. Dream has taken over the corner of the ballroom, and he appears to be sulking slightly. He doesn’t look bad.

Dark green pants and suit jacket. The bow tie is the same colour which gives Tommy mixed emotions, and his shirt underneath is white. Pretty standard outfit, and Dream isn’t going to stand out.

Solid enough plan.

“Hi,” Dream says.

“Hello,” Tommy replies, he puts his hands in his pockets and glances around him.

People are talking, mingling, doing whatever the fuck rich people do. Probably discussing tax evasion or something, whatever the fuck they do. Probably working, or sitting on yachts or something.

Dream snorts, “Look a bit awkward.”

“Feel even awkwarder...” Tommy looks over his shoulder. "What the fuck am I supposed to do?"

Dream shrugs, "Sulk in this corner with me? Because Sapnap and George obviously hate me ___"

"Why's that?"

"Sap said he was *busy*. Whatever that means, and George just had like a fifteen hour shift and passed out."

"He's busy?"

"Apparently," Dream sighs, "He's been spending less time with me and George. It's really upsetting."

"Like Quackity?"

"Yeah! Like Quackity, he just fucks off with no explanation. I'm... a bit worried, because that's not like him."

"I think he's alright," Tommy says, "Maybe he'll come to you about it later?"

Dream sighs and runs a hand through his hair, "Let's fucking hope so," he glances around. "So... Fundy, Quackity. Techno's friend and your friend. Those are our people?"

"Huh?"

"So— it's basically a protocol thing. You have a set of people you need to protect. So in a fight, like... I'll be assigned to protect the people on the ground and Phil protects people in buildings and... Fundy and Techno try to take them down."

Tommy pulls a face.

Dream sighs again, "Basically, it's so you keep tabs on the people that matter. It's basically second nature."

"Right..." Tommy says slowly. "The superhero training has broken your fucking brain."

"Yup."

"Tommy!" Someone says, and Tommy turns on his heel.

It is Fundy, the man himself. He's wearing a pretty standard outfit. Black suit jacket and pants, with a black tie and white shirt.

However he has this hat, and Tommy is about ninety percent sure that's from an anime—

Fundy grins brightly. "It's to piss off Wil!"

"Ah." Tommy says, "Fair enough."

Fundy looks at Tommy. "Any reason you look like a waiter?"

Tommy shrugs, "Not really, useful if I wanna go behind the scenes. Help out, y'know how it is."

Fundy screws up his face. "Are you doing reconnaissance work?"

Tommy laughs, "Nah. It's just useful to have someone who can go behind the scenes without too many questions. Maybe help out."

Fundy pulls a face. "That isn't your job?"

Dream swats at Fundy's arm and Fundy gives him a look. "Fundy, dude. We have someone who can get us the best desserts."

"We do!" Fundy grins and looks at Tommy.

"Black forest cake," Dream and Fundy chorus at the same time before looking at each other and laughing.

Tommy... feels like he's missing something, but okay.

"It's Quackity's least favourite," Fundy explains. "And makes him so mad whenever he sees it, he thinks it's a waste of batter."

"Also," Dream adds. "No one else really likes black forest cake, so it's the only dessert Fundy and I can have without people trying to steal it."

"Oh." Tommy says. "Right. Cool, maybe I'll try grab you some later."

"You are my favourite," Dream announces. "Look, just saying— SBI's department is great. But so's the Dream Team's."

Tommy gives him a look. "Ah yes. Let me quit and continue to work in the same building, that won't be awkward."

He's pretty sure Dream is grinning underneath his mask because the corners of his eyes crinkle up.

"Exactly!" Dream says, "In all seriousness, I think anyone in the tower will have you. Sam, Quackity and I have gotten into a battle over you."

"Huh?"

"Hypothetical," Dream waves a hand. "Who would you work with if Phil fired you."

"I don't think he's gonna fire me."

"Nah, he's not," Fundy says, "Techno and Wil are too attached to you." He picks up a champagne glass from a waiter who walks past with a practiced ease.

Dream gives him a look. "You. Are nineteen."

"L'Manberg drinking laws," Fundy muses, "Gotta be eighteen. Which I am, get your Americanisms outta here."

Dream glares, "A literal child."

"I'm really not, old enough to be a hero. Old enough to drink," he sips at the glass, before looking back at Tommy. "Holy fuck you're the same age as me."

"Mhmm." Tommy lies.

"You're so much more successful than me," Fundy groans.

"Fundy... you are literally a superhero," Dream deadpans.

"Yeah but he's cool! People like him, and he has that whole mysterious past thing going on. Also he keeps on decking Wilbur," Fundy sighs.

Tommy decides if the secret of him being sixteen gets out people *will* be having heart attacks. Not because he lied, because he appears to have achieved a lot at nineteen.

Imagine if they knew he was sixteen.

Ha. Okay.

Dream nods, as if considering it. "I mean yeah, but you're not unsuccessful."

"SBI's public opinion is the highest it has ever been! And that's after Wilbur kicked everyone's favourite vigilante off a roof, and Techno passed out in an alley," Fundy adjusts his hat and looks at Tommy. "I want to be you."

Tommy laughs. "No, no you do not."

"I simply do."

"You simply, do not," Tommy says.

Dream groans, "We get it. We get it. Now where's Quackity? I miss him."

"You saw each other half an hour ago." Fundy deadpans.

"I do not care," Dream announces. "Where is he? I want Quackity."

"You sound like you're a child." Tommy adds.

"You'd know about that," Dream snaps. "Literal child. An infant, I bet you don't even know swear words."

Tommy gives him a look.

Dream smiles in return. Well, the corners of his eyes wrinkle at least. "Okay, fuck this. Where's Quackity?"

"Telling the Floof story in the dining room when I left," Fundy says and Dream basically runs off.

Fundy sighs and looks at Tommy. "Shall we find Mister Soot."

"Never say that again," Tommy deadpans, but moves towards where he last saw Wilbur. Which was the entrance.

Okay, Tommy did run off very quickly and hopes that Wilbur didn't start fretting about him, it appears he hasn't.

He's standing in the centre of a room that Tommy doesn't know, and he's talking to someone.

A dude with a suit, it's buttoned up and everything. Pretty standard black suit with a black tie. He has horns, which curl around his ears. Some sort of ram, sheep hybrid situation then.

Wilbur laughs loudly, before looking up. "My favourite nineteen-year-olds," he gestures them over.

Fundy and Tommy walk over, before standing next to Wilbur on either side. Wilbur puts an arm around Fundy's shoulders.

"Tommy, this is Schlatt."

"Oh, nice to meet you," Tommy holds out his hand and this Schlatt fella takes it.

"Strong grip," Schlatt remarks, before looking at Wilbur. "So this is the legendary Tommy Underscore?"

"Yup," Tommy deadpans. "That... would be me, you're the... merch distribution company owner. Right?"

Schlatt nods, "Well... it's complicated, we do more than that. But yeah, essentially." He looks at Tommy squinting slightly.

Tommy shuffles under the gaze.

"Do I know you?" Schlatt says, he clicks his fingers. "You look like—" he glances at Wilbur before closing his mouth. "I think I saw you at the supermarket the other day."

Tommy has not been to the supermarket in a while. Considering Ranboo works at a supermarket, he tends to do the shopping.

"Y—yeah," Tommy nods. "Probably."

Schlatt clicks his fingers, "That's it. Well, nice to meet you Tommy. Fundy, a pleasure as always."

Fundy just gives him a look. "I am not forgiving you."

"Fundy—" Wilbur starts.

"He totally cheated to play Words With Friends!" Fundy yells, "There's no way he knows what composition means."

Schlatt snorts. "Fundy I understand that you're mad about composition—"

Fundy holds up a hand. "Don't even, Schlatt. Never talk to me or my son ever again."

"Son?" Wilbur's voice cracks. "What do you mean son."

Fundy walks off.

"Fundy! What do you mean son? I don't wanna be a Grandpa! Phil doesn't wanna be a great grandad."

"You're not even my dad!" Fundy yells, and walks off.

Wilbur chases him.

Schlatt clears his throat and Tommy looks at him.

They look at each other. "You were with Business Bay—"

"Shut, shut, shut," Tommy whispers, looking around him. "Say that a bit louder why don't you?"

"You were with—"

Tommy hits his hand over Schlatt's mouth. "Shut the fuck up," he hisses. "Okay? Shut the fuck up."

Schlatt just raises an eyebrow.

Tommy removes his hand, and wipes it on his pants. "What the fuck do you want?"

"Nothing," Schlatt says and Tommy finds himself believing it for a reason he doesn't quite know. "Honestly, Business Bay paid all their debts before disbanding. You were gone before then."

"Deo?" Tommy whispers, "How's Deo—"

"Fled the country," Schlatt says easily.

"Shit. Luke and Bitzel?" Tommy whispers. He knows not to have hope, but something slightly childish in his chest does.

He misses them. A little. Not a lot, but enough that it stings sometimes. He left three years ago, it's been a long time since... but still.

Schlatt whistles, "Bitzel got out, Luke didn't."

"Pandora's?"

Schlatt nods. "He was one of the threw leaders of the most notorious gangs in L'Manberg since the Sapphire Soldiers and killed countless people— of course he's in fucking Pandora."

Tommy hisses, before shoving his hands into his pockets. He's not sure if his powers are going to flip out from this or not.

Schlatt gives him a look. "For what it's worth. I'm sorry."

Tommy just glares. "Fuck you." He says, venom dripping from every word.

"What was your involvement?" Schlatt asks and Tommy stares at him wide-eyed. "You were friends with Deo. And Deo kept you safe, what did you give back?"

"Nothing." Tommy snaps through gritted teeth. He glares a little bit harder, "Okay? I didn't do anything for them. They owed me, and then Deo got attached and they kept me safe for—"

A long time.

"But—" Schlatt starts, he pauses and sighs slightly. "Nevermind. Fine," he waves a hand. "Nice to meet you Tommy."

Tommy glares.

"Or Sunflower. If you still go by that," Schlatt shrugs.

"Oh you bastard— how do you even know that—" Tommy reaches forwards, ready to slam Schlatt's head against the wall repeatedly.

There's a hand on his shoulder pulling him backwards.

Techno.

"Tommy."

"Blade," Tommy spits back, trying to shake off Techno's hand.

Techno does not let go. Probably the wise move. But Tommy is pissed.

How. How the fuck does Schlatt know about *that*. The nickname he was given by Deo, how did—

"Schlatt."

"Techno."

"Why are you pesterin' Tommy? Go find Wilbur."

"Just letting him know what I know. Complete transparency and all—"

"How do you know?" Tommy yells, "Only one person—"

Schlatt gives him something like a sad look. "I helped him get out. He told me to look after you."

"What a fuckin' fine job you did at that—"

"Tommy." Techno snaps. "Calm."

"But he—"

"Not now," Techno says, eyes on Schlatt. "Don't pester Tommy again, alright? Wil ain't gonna be happy."

Schlatt looks at Tommy. "Good luck Tommy. With whatever it is you are trying to do."

Tommy glares a bit more, and the grip on his shoulder tightens just a little bit more. Techno pulls him back slightly.

"C'mon Tommy."

Schlatt looks at Tommy. "I intend to keep that promise— we all owe him a lot."

Him is Deo.

Both of them know that.

Tommy grits his teeth as Techno drags him away, something which is worry on his face.

He's dragged into the ballroom, where Techno looks at him.

Techno looks like he's trying to figure out what to say.

He opens his mouth.

"Niki!" He says instead, it's painfully obvious that wasn't what he was going to say. But hey, what can you do?

Tommy turns around.

It's Niki (a shock, he's aware.) And she looks good. In fact, she is showing up everyone else at this gala.

As she should to be fair.

She's wearing pink pants and jacket, which have a darker pattern of lines across it, going both vertically and horizontally making little squares on her suit and pants.

Underneath that is a V-neck paler t-shirt, she's also wearing heels which make her look much taller. She also has a pocket square.

In her hair is a pink flower clip, and the flower looks fresh. It pushes hair away from one side of her face.

"Tommy," Niki says, "You look nice. Did you do something different with your hair?"

"Washed it?"

"Ah, that'll be it. It's fluffier than usual."

"I like the flower!" Tommy adds, he squints. "A petunia?"

"Mhmm," Niki nods, "I was going to have a pink carnation but I am pretty sure those are mother's day flowers."

"I think so, good move there."

"Yellow roses," Niki smiles, "Makes for some interesting colour combinations, I'll say that for sure."

Techno snorts. "Yes, because we care so much with how we wear a suit."

"Obviously!" Niki grins. "I love roses, they're so nice."

"Peony poppies," Tommy adds.

"Oh, those are lovely," she sighs wistfully. "Flowers are so beautiful, don't you think Techno?"

"Uh. They're okay."

Tommy and Niki look at Techno, eyes wide.

"Okay, I'll hide the body," Tommy says.

Niki laughs loudly, throwing her head back and clapping her hands together. "I'll cover for you Tommy, don't worry."

Techno looks slightly, "Niki I take all my words back. Flowers are amazing."

"Correct answer!" Niki smiles, and there's something playfully evil there. As there should be. "I suppose we shall keep you around a bit longer."

"Maybe." Tommy adds

"Precisely."

"I—" Techno starts, "Are terrified of you to."

"Why?" Niki asks with false innocence. "We're just a teenager and a little girl—"

"Don't even play that card," Techno says which makes Niki laugh. "Fighting me will be ableist."

"Not letting me fight you is sexist."

"Gaslight, gatekeep, girlboss him, queen." Tommy adds and that makes Niki laugh a bit harder. "I am gonna find Daniel, keep girlbossing him."

"Will do," Niki says.

Tommy walks off and hears them chattering as he leaves the room. Instead he enters a room he does not recognise at all.

Right. Okay.

His phone buzzes in his pocket. He grabs it and looks at it.

Nuclear Physicist (??):

1. hurry it up.

we don't have all day

i got a maths assignment istg

Hack And A Fraud:

okay, okay, stfu i'm going

Tommy puts his phone back in his pocket and puts it on silent. He takes a deep breath, before taking off the flower pin and stuffing it into his pocket.

He ruffles up his hair a bit more so it's sticking up more. He looks... well not that much different.

So he decides to drop the waistcoat. He's a bit sad about it, because waistcoats are objectively cool.

Still, he sighs and slips the waistcoat across the back of someone else's chair. He adjusts his tie.

Okay, to the kitchen.

Tommy follows one of the waiters towards the kitchen. Holding his head back as he looks confident.

Walking down a short hallway, he ends up in what he knows in his soul that this is the kitchen.

People are bustling around, cutlery clashing, people yelling. People moving with the practiced ease of customer service.

It hasn't been that long since he's worked in a restaurant. Couple of months. He sighs and straightens his back.

"We need more potatoes—"

"Where's the plates?"

"You," someone says and that's directed at him. Tommy looks over. "Stop lookin' like you're lost. Any requests from table seven?"

Tommy is so glad he checked the seating plan. Table 7 just so happens to be the one with Fundy, Purpled, Quackity and Dream.

Thank fuck.

"Two black forest cakes for table seven..." he pauses, Purpled hates strawberries. "And extra strawberries for Daniel Greyson. I believe he's having the brownie?"

"Uh, maybe," they say, "Go add it to the list."

They gesture vaguely and Tommy walks vaguely in that direction. Sure enough there's an iPad there.

He adds Dream, Fundy and Purpled (Daniel) to the lists. Before finding his name, and deciding he also wants an extra brownie.

Okay. That's done.

Now, he walks towards a door that can only be accessed through the kitchen. He's glad that Tubbo made him learn the directions.

So there's a really backdoor way, which is really fucking twisty. There are easier ways there, but they're all being guarded.

No one thought to guard here. (Tubbo found the guard's patrolling instructions. Not a single one mentioned this hallway or even this section. Just the entrances.)

Tommy starts up the staircase, looking over his shoulder as he does so. He's specifically careful to make as little noise as possible.

Hopefully he gets this over and done with. Then he can have his fun. Then they can work on reverse engineering to take down the rings. Or the guy from the warehouse. Either are great.

Tommy opens the door at the top of the stairs and peers out. Nothing. Just as the Tubbster predicted.

He steps out and glances around nervously.

Okay second left after the first door. The hallway should shoot off into one long hallway and at the end of that hallway was the main computer.

Well— not the main computer, but Tubbo decided that was the computer he needed, and Tommy knew better than to question him.

He walks down the hallway.

Right, if he's caught then he's just going to say that... okay. He needed a bathroom, or a WiFi connection to post about it on SBI's social media page.

Right. He can try those, he supposes.

Reaching the end of the hallway he pushes open the door. It's a plain room, white walls, a plant in the corner and a couple of computers.

The room is only lit by the hallway light, so Tommy squints as he makes his way towards the computer.

He turns it on.

Great first step. All the other steps to go. He pauses for a moment before getting out his phone and chucking Tubbo a text.

Then he plugs in the hardrive.

Transferring File 'L LOSERS' to Computer-AS67G.

The screen stays like that and Tommy looks at it. Right. Maybe it got caught by the malware? That didn't seem like a very Tubbo thing to do, he was better than that.

Tommy stares a bit longer.

File transfer complete.

Right. It appears that Tubbo has his in.

Transferring 327 files from Computer-AS67G to SanDisk USB - 'Tubbo's Side Piece'

Tommy snorts at the name before shaking his head.

That is a shit ton of files, Tommy stares a little bit harder like that'll help them transfer faster.

What sort of insane person is Tubbo? He grabs his phone and calls Tubbo, putting it next to his ear.

"Hello?"

"Three hundred and twenty-seven files. Tubbo, what the fucks?" Tommy says and there's various tapping on the other end.

"Holy shit." Tubbo mutters, "Okay it's supposed to look for Ranboo's name. Maybe he's mentioned in a lot of files?"

"How deep does this thing go?" Tommy whispers.

"Pretty fuckin' deep."

Tommy pauses, stifling a laugh.

"Don't—"

"That's what she said," Tommy finishes and Tubbo sighs.

"I expect better from you."

"I dunno why," Tommy laughs.

Tubbo hums and there's more tapping. *"Holy fuck,"* Tubbo says, *"These are encrypted up to my fuckin' ears."*

"What?" Tommy says.

"The files that have gone through so far. They're either emails, about cracking the encryption on Ranboo. Or some bigass files that are so encrypted it'll take me so long to get through them it's not funny."

"Shit," Tommy mutters. "Can you get around it?"

"Who do you think I am?" Tubbo snaps, *"Yes I can fucking get through it."* He hums for a moment longer. *"Okay the emails have nothing of value, they're all incapable of figuring this out. The encryption will be fine."*

Tommy nods. "Right. Okay, do you have everything that you need?"

“Almost,” Tubbo says, “Half of a file, that internet is amazing. Ours is struggling but that’s okay I can just—fix it. Give me a moment.”

Tommy gives him a moment.

“Okay a couple more seconds—”

Someone grabs the back of Tommy’s shirt and he hits the ground with a thump.

He looks up.

Someone with a white hoodie and a golden chain around his neck has a gun pointing at him. He looks a little bit like Purpled, same blond hair and controlled expression. The gun clicks and that... is not ideal.

Tommy stares at the gun, then up at the guy. Mouth slightly open.

He glances at the computer. Ah. This really doesn’t look good for him. Okay, it’s mostly all through.

“What the fuck?” Tommy yells, “Dude, what the fuck are you doing?”

“Pointing a gun at you. So why are you here?” He looks up at the screen, before taking a step over to it.

In pure panic, Tommy grabs his ankle, and yanks him to the ground. Whoever this is does not appear to be the biggest fan of this. Because he spins around and points the gun at Tommy’s forehead.

Not a great day for the Tommy community, he will admit that to himself. Zero out of ten, would not recommend—”

“You’re Wilbur’s,” the man says, dropping the gun slightly so it isn’t pointed at Tommy’s face. Which. Is better, he’s moving up in the world, and he loves that for himself. Step one of... he has no clue. “What the fuck are you doing—”

Tommy looks back at the computer screen.

Transfer Complete

Tommy looks back at the man. Who still has a gun pointed in his general direction, yeah... he needs to fix that. Sooner rather than later is preferred.

“Uh, WiFi.” Tommy manages, “Y’know, to post things—”

“What files are you transferring?” He says, and points the gun back at Tommy’s forehead.

Oh no. He’s gone down a level again.

“From my phone to the computer,” Tommy lies. Like a liar, “Just wanted to use the fancy looking computer to edit some photos, really that’s all.”

The man looks at him.

Before reaching down and yanking him up by the collar.

Tommy does what he does best, starts yellin' about shit.

“Don’t be a dick! This is manhandling, this is a federal crime. Do you wanna get arrested? I have so many lawyers that I’ll get on you. All of them, in fact I am the law. You really wanna risk that? I am the law!”

He’s dragged down the hall, and past a cupboard. He looks at it for a moment before continuing to be dragged down the hall as he spouts just absolute bullshit. “Let me go! Stop manhandling, this is fucking assault!”

Tommy will be lucky if he’s not charged for breaking and entry.

Wait. He left the USB there.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck—

“Let me go!” Tommy tries to shake off the man’s grip, but fails quite epically.

He stops in front of a guard, and the man holds the back of his shirt with a little bit more force. Tommy tries again to shake him off, but can’t manage it.

The guard is wearing full black, and looks at both of them, seemingly shocked.

“W—who are you two?”

“Lucas Munch,” he says, “Head of security at this Prime-forsaken event. I was doing the rounds and saw this little mongrel, how did he get in here?”

“Uh...” the guard pales, “I... do not know.”

The man sighs, “Find Wilbur Soot, tell him to be here right now. And tell him he needs to control his interns.”

The guard runs off, almost sprinting down the stairs and Tommy again tries to shake the man off.

“I’m not an intern!” Tommy yells.

The back of his shirt is pulled back and Tommy makes a small noise, before stumbling forwards and he glares at the man who glares back with three times the amount of force. Tommy shuffles under the glare.

“I couldn’t give less of a shit,” the man snaps. “You’re lucky I’m not pressing charges, snooping around in a government building and potentially tampering with government files. But instead, you’re not gonna tell anyone I was here—”

Tommy realises with a sort of cold freezing feeling that whoever this is, is not whoever he says he is.

A real guard wouldn’t need to say that. They’d be fine with whatever... because they’re supposed to be there, in fact maybe they’d encourage it.

Tommy stares, shoulders tensing up. He opens his mouth, and doesn’t turn around to face the guy. He just looks at the stairs, praying to anything out there that Wilbur will show up sooner rather than later.

“You’re not Lucas Munch,” Tommy whispers. “And you’re not a security guard.”

The man laughs behind him, “You’re quite a smart one aren’t you.” There’s the barrel of a gun pushed against the middle of his spine. “Smart enough to know what a bullet to the spine would do?”

Tommy’s shaking. He tries to stop it, but he just... can’t.

Taking a deep breath, he looks out on the stairs.

Wilbur. What the fuck? Where is he?

“Now,” the man says. “You’re not gonna say anything to Wilbur. Okay? You’re gonna go back down to the party, and leave it like that? Alright? This isn’t worth your stress.”

He sees a Wilbur coloured flash.

Oh thank anything out there.

The gun leaves the middle of his back.

Wilbur stands at the bottom of the stairs, looking up at Tommy. “What the fuck did you do Tommy?”

Tommy gives a shaky smile. “I tried to find some WiFi... and an Adobe program, it did not go great.”

Wilbur sighs, glancing at whoever is standing behind him. The alleged ‘Lucas’. He looks back at Tommy, looking slightly more concerned. “You okay?” He asks, “You’re shaking.”

Tommy nods and basically falls down the stairs. He basically runs towards Wilbur and throws his arms around Wilbur's shoulders. "Fuck," Tommy says quietly, mostly to himself. "That was pretty scary."

Wilbur lets go and looks at Tommy, then at 'Lucas', then back at Tommy. Face twisting into concern, "You sure? You don't seem very okay. What's up?"

"Nothing," Tommy mutters, turning around and walking as quickly as he can to the main area without looking suspicious. "Just... he had a gun and that freaked me out for no reason at all."

Wilbur pulls a face, "Are you sure?"

"I'm sure!" Tommy yells, before slapping a hand over his mouth. "Sorry for yelling."

"It's okay," Wilbur says softly, and sometimes Tommy forgets that Wilbur can get his voice that soft. "Do you need anything?"

"No," Tommy looks at Wilbur, he sighs slightly. "Hey, where's Quackity?" He asks quietly, trying to not let his voice break. It doesn't but his hands shake slightly.

Why has this freaked him out so much?

"No clue," Wilbur shrugs, "But Dream and Niki are over here, they're having a handstand competition, it looked like Niki was winning last time. Dream looked pretty shaky, and then after that we have dinner and then all the fun finishes."

Tommy looks around, "Hey, where's Tech?"

"No clue? Probably bullyin' someone," Wilbur looks at Tommy, his expression softens. "You sure you're okay?"

Tommy nods.

Hey... where is Techno?

Speaking of which, where the fuck is Purpled?

Slipping away from the gala is easy, he just gives a big grin, whispers something to Niki who promises to cover him. He doesn't drop his suit jacket, instead he puts it on correctly and holds his breath.

He just needs to find an office.

He darts up the stairs, apologising as he almost bumps into people. This way he can play the toilet card, if he's rushing like this. He reaches the top of the stairs and scans around.

There's a guard at the doorway, Techno hums and looks around. There's a surprising amount of people on the stairway. He could just... shove someone down the stairs, probably not an old person.

He'll push some white dude down the stairs.

He scans the stairs, before walking towards one of the guys. They have red hair, which is always a good sign. And Techno really hopes it isn't Fundy because that won't be his best look.

Techno bumps his shoulder into the man, and the man goes tumbling.

He manages to take down four people on the way, and that's impressive.

Techno stares at the pile of limbs at the bottom of the stairs, before turning on his heel and walking back up to the top of the stairs.

He watches the guard scramble down the stairs, and he just steps to where the guard had been and starts down the hallway.

There's a fork in the hallway, and Techno pauses.

Right, okay.

To the left, Techno guesses. He takes some careful steps. Down the hallway, he can hear yelling.

Techno swears under his breath, before looking around. There... there's a supply closet. He opens it and shoves himself in.

It's squishy, and filled with paper. He winces, before pressing against the back of the wall.

“—In fact I am the law. You really wanna risk that? I am the law!”

That's Tommy.

Techno's heart *drops*. To the fucking floor.

“Let me go asshat, I was just looking for some signal! I swear, what the fuck would I want with a boring office—”

Techno slaps his hand over his mouth. He has to physically stop himself from running after Tommy. He doesn't sound like he's in pain. Techno *prays* that he's not a very, very good actor. He instead hopes that Tommy is mildly offended.

"Let me go! Stop manhandling, this is fucking assault!" The voice gets further and further away, and Techno steps outside of the cupboard.

He pauses for a long moment, waiting for anything.

Before going up the hall Tommy was dragged down.

He walks down the hallway.

Slowly... he swings open the door, just a wooden door. Techno sighs, pausing at the opened door before stepping into the room.

The room is... plain to say the least.

It's just an office, white walls, a plant and computer light flooding the room. Otherwise it was dark, Techno approaches the computer slowly.

There's a pen or two, in cup holders.

The computer is off. But Techno can see a hard-drive on it, he switches the screen on. It's apparently... downloading something, and it's almost done. He doesn't bother to see what it is, because to be frank he doesn't *really* care.

But hey, he can give this back to Tommy.

Techno reaches out to grab the hard-drive. He'll give it back to Tommy when they see each other next, he brings up the database and squints at the records. Right. Bad, he just needs to find Bad—

He's yanked backwards, and Techno twists before landing on his back.

There's a gun pointed at his head.

"Techno."

"Purpled," Techno responds, looking up at the boy. Who did not falter slightly, impressive. Whoever trained him, did a good job of it. "Here for a client, I suppose— related to the tower or—"

Purpled rolls his eyes, "Okay then fucker. Get this straight—"

Techno kicks out his leg, hitting Purpled in the ankle who doesn't yelp. (Impressive.) Instead he moves so he's standing on Techno's wrist, there's something almost wild behind his eyes. Very little appears to be calculated...

That doesn't seem like Purpled.

Purpled grins, "Come on jackass, I know you can't do shit without hurting me—"

Techno scowls. "I'm not afraid to hurt you," he lies and Purpled raises an eyebrow.

"Your ear twitches when you lie," Purpled says. He's too comfortable with the gun and something about that doesn't sit quite right with Techno. So Techno instead glares at Purpled. "Oh, I could have fun with this. Technoblade, do you hate Tommy—"

“What? No?”

Purpled raises an eyebrow, “Damn. You’re not lying, that’s interesting... uh... why are you here?”

Techno sighs slightly, before jerking his arm upwards, Purpled stumbles backwards and Techno scrambles back onto his feet before grabbing a knife and pointing it in Purpled’s general direction.

Purpled rolls his eyes, “Whatever you’re lookin’ for—”

“Which has nothing to do with you—” Techno hisses.

Purpled pauses for a moment, “Wait, why were you trying to grab the harddrive—”

The door knob jiggles and Purpled swears under his breath. He yanks Techno back by the back of his shirt, and Techno suppresses the yelp as he’s dragged under a table with Purpled. It’s almost funny.

Keyword. Almost.

Purpled grabs Techno and slaps his hand over his mouth. “Shut the fuck up,” Purpled hisses, he doesn’t move his hand and Techno expects that. He shuffles backwards, dragging Techno with him slightly.

Techno hisses, and tries to get Purpled’s hand away but Purpled doesn’t even react.

There’s footsteps and Purpled goes dead still.

Techno does the same.

The footsteps move around a bit, before pausing at the computer.

Purpled takes a deep breath, before grabbing a knife from... somewhere. Techno pulls a face, before grabbing Purpled's arm and holding onto it with everything he has, Purpled tries to get it away. But he can't...

Techno is smarter than that.

The feet leave the room.

Purpled's face is pale. "That's... Punz," he whispers, and his voice breaks in the middle. "That's— what's he— this can't be good—" he slides out from underneath the table and stares at the closed door. "I'm going after him—"

The building shakes and someone screams.

Techno pulls Purpled back under the table as the building shakes around them. Some of the pen holders clatter onto the ground and Techno looks around.

Everything appears to be in order—

"What was that?" Techno asks.

Purpled looks incredibly pale. "I— I think that was a bomb."

Techno freezes.

Wilbur.

“Oh fuck!” Purpled yells, “Where’s Tommy?”

“So,” Wilbur explains, throwing an arm around Tommy’s shoulder as he holds a champagne glass in his hands loosely. Tommy is also holding one, but decidedly not going to drink it because he’s not insane. “Then— Kristin was not happy with me. I can not think of why.”

Tommy laughs, realising it’s slightly forced before looking around.

Wait. Where’s Purpled?

He adjusts his tie slightly, not out of need, out of something to do with his hands. His eyes dart around, scanning for anyone else he knows.

He can see Quackity and Fundy in the corner, talking quietly and he’s not sure how to feel about that— he looks at Wilbur and shakes off his arm.

Wilbur pulls a face.

“I’m gonna talk to Quackity and Fundy,” Tommy whispers.

Wilbur nods, and Tommy finds his way through the crowd over to Fundy and Quackity.

Quackity spies him first and waves, which makes Fundy turn around and he also grins. Tommy grins back and swirls the champagne in his glass, he’s not gonna drink it... probably.

But still... he *could*.

“Tommy!” Quackity grins widely, “How has it been man? Fit in well enough?”

“Yeah!” Tommy ignores the nick from the knife that he *knows* is coming from his shoulder. Not a lot though, just some... but still, more than slightly nerve wracking. Some dude caught him snooping, less than ideal. “It’s been fun, I had a dance-off with Daniel who kicked my ass, but that’s alright.”

Quackity nods and smiles fondly. “Yeah...” he looks at the champagne. “Are you old enough to drink that?”

“Yup,” Tommy grins, “Don’t want to though... I don't like it.”

Quackity laughs, “Fair, I’ll take you *proper drinking* if you want to one day.”

“Nah,” Tommy screws up his nose, “Don’t really want to.”

“Fair, fair,” Quackity nods and sips at his own drink. “Wilbur appears to be having fun.”

Tommy looks over his shoulder, Wilbur... does look like he’s having fun. But Tommy can see the slightest tension in his shoulders, the slightest stutter in his voice. He’s grinning and entertaining and really being the centre of it all.

“Look closer,” Tommy shrugs and sips at his drink again. “Shoulders, too tense.”

“Oh... yeah,” Quackity nods.

Fundy doesn't say much, and Tommy realises that's because he is currently shoving little pies into his mouth. Which Tommy can respect.

Eventually Fundy gets through the pies, wipes his mouth on his sleeve (Tommy can already feel Wilbur's lecture.) And grins at Tommy. "Hey, Tommy, Tommy, Tommy—"

"Fundy, Fundy, Fundy—"

"Have you seen Daniel?" Fundy says straight away, face dropping a bit. "I haven't seen him in a bit and I'm kinda worried."

Quackity looks at Fundy. "Daniel's missing?"

"Relax," Tommy says, shooting Fundy a look. "He's probably ripped his suit or something. We can look if you want—"

"Yes." Quackity says with zero hesitation, he fidgets with the hem of his blazer before sighing slightly, "Fundy and Tommy, can you go check the bathroom? I'll ask around."

Tommy nods, turning around and Fundy walks step-in-step with him. The dining hall is rather large, and they have to get around at least two crowds of people being knobs and making a mess for the poor serving staff.

(He'll email a huge thank you later.)

Fundy looks at him, before around the hall. They approach the hallway that leads to the bathroom.

Fundy stops completely, before looking over his shoulder.

“Something’s wrong—”

“Wait what—”

“GET DOWN!” Fundy screeches, grabbing Tommy and they both hit the floor.

A second later there’s a deafening echo in his ears. It shakes Tommy and his entire head seems to roll at the noise. His ears screech at him and Tommy’s head feels... an odd amount lighter than usual.

Heat is everywhere. Everything is warm.

Tommy rolls onto his back and stares up at the ceiling.

It’s a nice ceiling, and it’s quite warm here actually. Tommy’s ears are like... singing but badly, he stares for a bit longer. Listening to the static in his ears, before noticing that someone is shaking him.

Tommy looks at the person ruining the *vibe* .

It’s Fundy, with wide and concerned eyes. He shakes Tommy a bit harder.

His lips are moving, but Tommy can’t... hear anything, apart from the static screeching in his ears that make him wince slightly.

It’s so loud.

“—mmy! Tommy!”

It's underwater this time, he can hear yelling and footsteps.

He blinks, trying to focus on Fundy. Fundy shakes him a bit more. "Tommy, you gotta go!"

"Purpled..." he whispers.

"What?" Fundy asks, screwing up his nose. "The vigilante?"

"Wilbur? Where's Wilbur?" Tommy asks.

And all his thoughts hit him at once.

All the sounds hit him at once too, he can hear people screaming, footsteps he can hear everything. He blinks and tries to sort through it all so he can focus on Fundy's voice again. He manages to do that.

Things are being thrown, he's vaguely aware of that. And people are yelling— ah. They're always yelling. Tommy tries to shake himself out of... this, but fails quite epicly. He stares at Fundy, holding onto his shoulders tightly.

"Wilbur. Techno," Tommy starts going through the list. "P— Daniel. Quackity... Dream is here, we need— everyone out."

Fundy stands up, looking over his shoulder. "Tommy, just get out. That isn't your job, we're trained—"

Tommy stumbles onto his feet, his head feels light and he can't *focus* on anything. "No— I'm not gonna—"

Someone lands in front of them. Fundy takes a step back and Tommy tries to focus his eyes. What is happening?

They wear a gas mask, similar to Sam's. But it's completely black, they also wear black goggles that are tinted so much that Tommy won't even get a shot at looking at their eyes. Fair enough disguise, hides all features.

The black hoodie (which has its hood up.) Also adds—

Tommy's not sure why he's focusing on the clothes, but he is.

“Outwit,” they snarl.

Fundy stares with wide eyes.

He grabs Tommy and they both duck, a bullet lodges itself in the wall where Fundy just was. Fundy stares at it for a moment, eyes wide. “Oh fuck,” Fundy says, before looking back at Tommy.

Tommy looks at the person. Then back at Fundy.

Then Tommy doesn't the fucking stupidest thing he can.

He walks up towards the person, grabbing the gun and yanking it so it's resting against his chest. They could pull the trigger, and Tommy... well he would die.

Okay that's a lie, he'd jam the gun.

But still.

There is a gun resting against his chest.

Tommy grins at the person. “Hi!”

They try to pull the gun away, and try to get away... which is fair enough. Tommy would be doing the same.

Tommy *thinks* something in his brain has broken, and he currently has the self preservation of most types of shellfish. This... this is bad even for him, and Tubbo would *kill* him if he found out.

“Shoot,” Tommy says carefully, “You’re obviously trying to kill him—”

“I’m not gonna—”

“Feels realer,” Tommy adds, looking at the goggles, trying to look into eyes that won’t really see him back. “Doesn’t it? That I’m here and talking to you. Fundy, you should probably be going—”

“Tommy?”

Tommy smiles up at the general direction of the face. “You could shoot—”

Tommy flicks his wrist, the gun jammed. This isn’t a problem, he wouldn’t get shot even if the other tries. He smiles again, and Fundy is staring at him with horror... which is fair, Tommy is being a bit unhinged.

Even for himself.

“W—what? No,” they squeak.

“Okay,” Tommy yanks the gun out of their hands and points it at them. “Now. I’m not gonna shoot you—” he glances at the gun.

The safety is on.

Tommy sighs, “The safety is on man. Responsible gun handling, okay— we’re gonna go now.”

He looks at Fundy, whose eyes are wide.

“What?” Tommy asks.

“Y—you— what are you?”

“Social media manager,” Tommy holds the gun in his hand, before stepping around whoever this is. He doesn’t care much to unmask them, it’s too early for this.

He needs to find Purpled, Techno and Wilbur. Quackity and Dream are bonuses, but Tommy has the sneaking suspicion that they have what they need under control.

There’s still screaming, and fire. Footsteps pounding against the ground, running around him. Tommy scans, he’s looking for bright pink hair, purple suit or... Wilbur with his suit. Which while fashionable, isn’t exactly that unique.

Right. Okay.

He looks at Fundy. Fundy blinks at him a few times.

“Go get people out,” Tommy says, “Disarm anyone with guns in outfits. I’ll get out—”

“W—what?” Fundy whispers, “You—”

“Part of my interview was literally if I can handle stressful situations,” Tommy says. “Go!”

Fundy blinks at him, before stumbling off.

Right. Okay.

Tommy decides to ditch the tie, because he doesn’t want to be yanked around by that, or get it stuck on anything. He throws it onto the floor before setting off to the last place he saw Wilbur.

The centre of the main ballroom.

Someone almost runs into him, and Tommy lets them go around him.

It’s really loud.

Someone bumps into him, before staring at him with wide eyes. “Run you idiot!”

Tommy does not, instead he walks through the archway.

Wilbur is standing there. Completely frozen.

Okay, looks like Tommy isn't the only one with explosion related trauma—

Tommy runs over, shoving some poor person out of the way and stopping in front of Wilbur.

Okay. Blank eyes, not ideal but workable.

He shakes Wilbur's shoulders slightly. "Wilbur. Wilbur. Wil—"

Okay nothing.

Way less than ideal.

"Wil," Tommy tries again. "Wilbur Soot? Bitch boy, oh fuck okay—"

There's footsteps behind him, that stop, and Tommy spins around. Fully aware that he is using himself as a shield and more than okay with that fact. Wanna shoot Wilbur? Fair. You're gonna have to get through him first.

Tommy blinks at the person in front of him.

Okay. Right.

Same black mask, with the whole fucking cool punk look. Black hoodie. This one has a ghost on it, that's fun. Hood up, and gun pointed right at Tommy.

“You’re not Spectre.”

“Really?” Tommy asks slowly, “That... shocks me.”

“Move,” they say, gesturing with the gun. “Move and then this’ll be easy for the both of us—you can say you didn’t get here in time. Cameras are out, they’ll believe you—”

“No.”

They sigh, relaxing their shoulders slightly. He can almost feel the eyeroll behind the goggles. “Dude. Come on. Let me just— pew, pew. Y’know?”

“No?” Tommy says, “I’m not letting you shoot Wilbur!”

They sigh again. “Dude. I was supposed to have this dramatic speech, then I’d fucking shoot him! You’re no fun. Was supposed to dramatically reveal the Angels. See! Look at my gas mask.” They point to a spot on the mask.

There’s some sort of flower looking thing there. It looks... a bit like a dark purple iris. It’s barely noticeable.

Tommy nods, grip tightening on his gun.

“Who the fuck are you guys?” Tommy whispers, surprised he doesn’t burst into tears on the spot. That is rather impressive. Even for him. “W—what do you want?”

“Right now?” They say, “I wanna shoot Spectre. Wait. Would this bullet travel through you?”

Everything shakes again.

Another explosion then. The ground shakes, the walls creak at the effort and most plaster falls down from the roof. Mostly dust... not completely though, he

Tommy almost falls over, but instead grabs onto Wilbur who still looks... so far away that it's terrifying.

Ghost-hoodie also looks around, panic shown in their body language.

His ears ring again— he blinks a few times.

Still ringing, this can not be normal.

It's not static this time—

“We’re Elysium’s Angels—” they said, voice even and gun pointing at Tommy with *too much* confidence. “We have seen the injustice, and we are gonna correct it. The best we can.”

“Bitch I am the injustice!” Tommy yells, “Shooting me is—” he panics. For a long second, and ghost-hoodie just looks at him. He can’t see their facial features, but he knows that they’re disappointed. “Ah, um— classist!” Tommy decides on.

“No, no, no,” Ghost-hoodie shakes their head. “You don’t get to play that card— you’re at a charity gala— with superheroes.”

“I work for them!” Tommy blurts out, “And I was the last choice and he didn’t want to be alone. Shooting me is a hate crime!”

“That’s not what a hate crime is!”

“Well... I’m gonna hate it!”

“What does that mean?” They yell back.

“I don’t wanna be shot!” Tommy yells back, “It’s not something I really want to happen today—”

Ghost-Hoodie grunts, before walking forwards and grabbing Tommy by the collar. They haul him out of the way before pointing their gun at Wilbur.

That’ll hit—

Tommy kicks his leg out, hitting Ghost-Hoodie in the knee. They crumple, which Tommy thought they’d do.

The gun skitters across the ground, and Tommy returns by pointing his own gun at them.

They look up at him.

“Aren’t you a social media guy?” They say.

Tommy’s mouth quirks up into a smile, “Yeah. That’s embarrassing—”

“Tommy?” That’s Purpled. “Oh thank fuck—” he jumps down the last few stairs and Techno follows after him.

“Where’s Niki?” Techno asks, “Have you seen her?”

“No!”

“Fuck,” Techno reaches for his pocket, pulling out his phone.

“We gotta go—” Tommy says, “Wilbur’s been unresponsive.”

Techno almost falls down the last stair. “Fuck. Okay. Purpled—”

“You know about that—”

“Not the time!” Purpled adds, “I’ll call Niki,” he takes Techno’s phone.

The ground shakes again, not as close this time.

Okay. Further away.

Purpled holds the phone up to his ear.

Okay! Four outta five ain’t bad.

“Tommy, scout ahead!” Techno directs.

Okay, Tommy is more than happy to be bossed around.

Tommy starts heading towards the entrance.

And—

That's blood on the floor, and that's someone injured sitting against the wall.

And—

That's Fundy.

Holy shit that's Fundy —

Tommy stumbles forwards, dropping and kneeling in front of Fundy. He's slumped against the wall, eyes half open, he acknowledges Tommy with sleepy eyes. For a moment Tommy's brain blanks on every bit of first aid he's been taught—

Fundy?

“Oh fuck, oh fuck. Techno!” Tommy yells, “Techno! Help me!”

Footsteps run down the hall.

There's blood everywhere.

This is not going well!

“Fuck!” Techno yells, “Fundy, Fundy,” he grabs Fundy by the shoulder and Fundy looks up at him. It looks like it hurts to do that. “Fundy. Okay, are you listening to me? I'm not losing my favourite orphan—”

Fundy laughs, it's a short and painful thing.

"Three bullets. No exit wounds," Fundy mutters.

"You're fine, you're fine," Techno says, "Okay?" He takes off his suit jacket and pushes it against Fundy's stomach. "It's just going to need pressure, which we're doing— you were there for that first-aid class. You'll be okay."

Fundy blinks at Techno. "It's not lookin' great."

"It's fine, it's fine," Techno says but it seems slightly forced. "Purpled! I need your suit jacket! And Wilbur's!"

Two jackets are thrown at them a moment later. Which Techno pushes against Fundy's stomach. They need more. They don't really have more—

Techno takes off Fundy's nonetheless and adds that to the pile.

"We wait for medics—"

He sees a flash of black next to him, and Tommy's already using his powers before he can stop himself. The... what were they called? Elysium's Angels? They fall to the ground, and Techno gives him a worried look.

"Tommy. Calm down. It's fine," Techno looks back at Fundy. "You hear that Fundy? It's okay."

"This went well," Fundy mutters, "How much blood have I lost?"

“Not two litres,” Techno says, “You’re alright... the blood is slowing down. Okay, it just sucks—you’re fine. We’re good. We just need a medic— Purpled, go find a medic.”

Purpled nods and runs towards the doors at full sprint.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” Techno says, “Nope. Nope. Fundy, stay awake—”

“Not dyin’,” Fundy mutters. “Losing consciousness... isn’t that at fifty-percent blood loss?”

“Or adrenaline crashing— fucking hell I hope it’s that.”

“I’m just sleeping,” Fundy mutters. “I’m tired Tech—”

“I know, I know,” Techno says slowly, “I know. But you gotta stay awake, just for a bit longer— we need responses from you. Think of how mad Wilbur is gonna be if you fall asleep.”

“Where’s Wil?” Fundy mutters quietly, “Want Wil...”

Techno pulls a face, “I know, I know. He’s having a bit of a struggle at the moment. He’s alright, just doesn’t deal with explosions well.”

“Want... Wil,” Fundy says again, words slurring slightly.

Tommy looks at Techno, eyes wide.

“He’s fine,” Techno says through gritted teeth. “We’re fine. You’re fine Fundy. Everyone’s safe, we’re just waiting for paramedics.”

Fundy sighs and leans to the side a bit, Techno has to keep him upright.

“Fundy, who shot you?” Techno says, his voice is all gentle, all care.

“Mask...” Fundy says again, “Like Sam’s... but... not. Called themselves— Elysium’s Angels.”

Techno’s eyes shoot wide. “Elysium? Like—”

Fundy shrugs, “Think they— attacked—”

“Yeah...” Techno says, “Seems like that. You’re fine.”

There’s blood everywhere, on Tommy’s clothes, on Techno’s clothes and both of their hands and somehow there’s blood in Techno’s hair. On the ground— it’s everywhere... how has he lost this much blood?

“Am I fine?” Fundy asks, “Feel... funny.” Fundy looks up and around, “Hey, Wil’s over there — that’s... good for him.”

And for a split second, Techno looks panicked. He hides it as quickly as it happened.

“He’s okay,” Tommy says, “Still conscious, still talking and we can understand him— we really need a medic—”

“I know!” Techno yells and Tommy flinches. “I know...” he repeats voice lower. “I know, Tommy.”

Tommy nods, “Sorry.”

“Tommy, can you make sure Wil is okay?”

Tommy nods and takes a few steps away... there’s so, so, so much blood. He shuffles over to Wilbur, he’s still standing and blood is hitting the edge of his shoes. Tommy slowly makes Wilbur sit down.

He ignores Techno muttering to Fundy in low tones. Instead, turning focus to Wilbur.

“Wil?” Tommy says carefully, shaking his shoulder slightly.

Still glassy.

“Wilbur,” Tommy whispers, “We kinda need you right now buddy. Fundy needs you, and this isn’t your fault. But... it’s less than ideal, it’s almost funny, just how terrible things went. Uh... I dunno what else to say, just... hi.”

Wilbur blinks.

Okay. That’s a start.

Wilbur blinks again, his eyes are clearer. “Tommy?”

“Hey, Wil—”

“Fundy!” Wilbur yells, almost jumping over Tommy and stumbling forwards, before landing next to Fundy and looking at Wilbur. “W—what?”

“Wil,” Techno says carefully. “Stay calm. Okay?”

“But—”

“Calm.” Techno snaps. “We’re waiting for a medic.”

Wilbur goes to stand up.

“No.” Techno says, “Wilbur you disassociated for like five minutes straight. Okay? You’re not in a good mindspace.”

Fundy makes a noise and Techno falls quiet.

“Hey, hey, hey,” Wilbur whispers, “Funds, you’re good. Okay, we’re just waiting for someone— okay. We’re okay, you’re good.”

Fundy sighs, it sounds... almost resigned.

“No, nope, nope, my little champion isn’t going to sleep. Stay awake—”

Tommy... is panicking.

He can feel it rising in him slowly, making the tips of his fingers tingle and he feels. A... lot, he feels it in his gut. Tears that aren’t spilling but are threatening to, and a headache tapping on the back of his skull—

His powers are going to outburst—

He looks at Techno.

Fuck. Fuck. Now he's panicking about panicking—

Something falls to the ground behind them.

Techno jumps as does Tommy.

It's just a painting, and both of them know that.

Still, Techno looks at Tommy.

Tommy looks down at his hands, there are small sparks falling onto the ground. He closes his hands and stares at Techno with wide eyes.

Techno also looks panicked. Which is... fair enough... Tommy feels pretty fucking panicked too.

“Calm down,” Techno says, “He's okay.”

“Is he?” Tommy whispers back, he barely hears it.

Techno nods, he seems more sure of himself.

Tommy finds himself walking towards Techno, he glances at Wilbur who has his full effort and then more on Fundy. Tommy then holds out his hands, his hands that are sparking slightly.

“Shit,” Techno mutters. “Tommy. Everything’s fine— you need to stay calm. For Fundy’s sake.”

“I know that!” Tommy yells back, there’s a hint of desperation in his voice. Well... there’s much more than a hint. He shakes his head, “I—”

Purpled scrambles into the building, almost tripping as he runs. “Medics are here!” And people scramble in behind Purpled.

The next bit.

A bit of a blur, he’s vaguely aware of what happened. But he can’t really... name it that well.

Wilbur went with Fundy to the hospital.

There were lights and cars, and crowds and even more blood. Techno held Tommy close as they fought through flashing lights and concerned reporters. Purpled holds up Niki’s jacket as a face shield and Niki... well he doesn’t remember how Niki walked.

Phil is there, with a car. Which is great. And they all clamber in.

He hopes Fundy is okay.

He hopes Wilbur is okay. Holy shit, he hopes Wilbur is okay.

He washes the blood off his hands and it's not the first time, his hands spark as he does that and Techno looks nervous.

Then Phil is... there. He remembers that, because Phil drove all of them to his house.

He comes back to it when the car parks. His hands are shaking, still slightly stained from the blood, he blinks and looks at Purpled. Purpled isn't shaking but he's staring out the window.

Phil sighs, "This is it guys. Floof is inside, Kristin is taking care of him. I'm gonna go see Wil, check up on him,"

Tommy nods, he feels... lighter than usual.

They get out of the car.

Techno laughs, it's mostly humourless but there's some sort of fondness there. He leaves the door open and leans in to talk to Phil, "I think this calls for Chinese."

Phil pulls an unreadable face, and he scowls. Just lightly. "It's already ordered. On the kitchen counter," he looks at everyone. Niki, Purpled and Tommy before sighing slightly. "Take care of yourselves."

"You too," Techno closes the door and Phil drives off.

Phil's house is really nice, and Tommy has the funniest feeling that he's staying the night here. He probably couldn't get home even if he wanted to.

"Chinese?" Purpled asks weakly.

Techno huffs, “It’s tradition. When everything goes wrong we get Chinese and just... sorta eat it in silence.”

“How often does everything go wrong?” Tommy asks.

“They have our order memorised based on our tone of voice,” Techno deadpans before walking towards the house.

Techno opens the door. He sighs. “Dumplings... ah, that really means things have gone to shit.”

And yeah... that seems like a nice way of saying it.

Tommy’s hands are still shaking and they’re still stained red, “Where’s the closest bathroom?” He asks.

He doesn’t even look at how nice Phil’s house is, he’s vaguely aware it’s modernish. But he just needs a bathroom, he needs to get the blood off of his hands and he needs to fucking stop shaking.

“Second door on the left, up the stairs,” Techno says.

Tommy basically runs up the stairs, legs shaking, almost falling over as he barrels into the bathroom. He closes the door behind him and leans against it.

He’s shaking so much.

It’s not like he’s never seen blood before, why is he so freaked out by this?

Stumbling over to the sink, he grabs the side of it before starting to wash his hands. To get rid of the pink stain it shouldn't have. His hands shouldn't be pink, that's Fundy's blood. He can't be—

He scrubs his hands. It's not— it's still there.

The door opens, Kristin is standing in the doorway. Her face is all soft, and Tommy looks down at his hands.

“Hey,” she says softly.

“Hi.” Tommy rasps out.

“You okay?” She asks, voice still... just incredibly soft and caring. It almost makes Tommy pass out.

“No,” Tommy whispers, shaking his head. Tears well up in his eyes and he fights to make them go away. It doesn't seem like a fight he's winning but he's willing to try and win it nonetheless. “Everything went wrong and I— fuck.”

“It's okay.”

“It's not!”

“It will be,” Kristin reassures and Tommy almost wants to believe her. “Fundy is strong, and braver than we all give credit for.”

Tommy nods slowly, “It's— I'm.” He fails to say anything.

Instead Kristin hugs him.

And Tommy... well in complete honesty he cries a little bit.

He cries a lot.

Chapter End Notes

Today instead of a meme I bring a fic [*'This The Kinda Thanks I Get?'*](#) It is THE perfect mix of light-heartedness (mainly the titles of the chapters /lh) and ripping out my heart. And it's only two chapters so far. So if you like TINAAOS, you'll like this fic!

Summary:

Ah fuck. The gala episode. There's some mad banter with the gang. Yada yada, suit drama. Wilbur being a little bitch over suits. You know how it is. Techno wingman's Kristin and Phil. They leave. yellow roses happen because Apollo said so and they get a cameo in this chapter.

Ahhhh, yup. Tommy talks to everyone like a mad lad. That happens, he gets bored and goes "imma go download government files illegally" he does that. He gets caught doing that, then threatened until Wilbur shows up and is like "bruh. Can you... not?" So he doesn't.

Technoblade, he pushes a guy down the stairs. Gets to an office, gets beaten up by Purpled. Finds Punz. Then they hide under a table until the room shakes and they're like "oh shit."

Things are not going well for Tommy because Wilbur is struggling. Then Purpled and Techno show up and they're like "okay let's go" but Fundy's injured quite badly so they don't go because all of SBI love Fundy in this fic..

OH YEAH THE ANGELS. They're the poppy gang, they're what caused all the commotion and injured Fundy.

Yeah... Phil picks them up, they go to Phil's and Tommy goes to the bathroom to get the blood off his hands, and Kristin sees him and is like "you good?" and Tommy is like "no." And cries.

ALSO ART!

[Tina!Tommy complaining about yet another PR nightmare](#), drawn by the lovely Sorul!

[Tina!characters meet their DSMP counterparts](#) by Zal. Which is so funny and WZHUS /pos. (Sorry for not getting the credit in time, I really wanted to get the chapter out. Just DM me.)

[Tommy just looking generally stressed](#) by Linear, which is very funny and very accurate. (Same for Zal, sorry, DM me with a link and I will add it. Super sorry.)

New kid on the block /lh. Ripple! (Who some of you might already know.) Did some art and made [a TikTok](#) based on TINAAOS which is wild to think about. Along with a [tina!techno casual outfit](#), [sleepnoblade](#) and [Tommy and Floof in suits](#). Thanks a bunch!

As always! Thank you so much for the art.

I must go the obligatory [discord](#) update so between this chapter and last chapter.

- Pistol and Nebula. Need I say more?
 - I discovered that Logstechire is actually spelt Logstedshire and no one told me
 - Uuuuh, I bullied them all with out of context spoilers for this chapter. Hope it made sense, because it was funny to write.
 - We welcomed Cress to our mod team! That's not the chaotic content you look for, but it's what I'm going to say. So thank you Cress!
- Also go to the [poll](#) about the TINAAOS villain, it's just a bit of fun! Also tells me how well I'm foreshadowing.

In Which Tommy Decks Philza

Chapter Summary

somebody's halls are getting decked

... it's phil's

or. tommy gets the girlboss arc he deserves

Chapter Notes

Warnings: knives, talks of explosions and injury

Thank you to Nebula and Pistol for helping me with the French translations for Tubbo!
<333

Also ART IS HERE BECAUSE AO3 IS A BITCH.

WE HAVE MORE COOL THINGS!!

[This Tiktok](#) by [Cricket/Tommy](#) which is both very funny, and has angst potential

A [Purpled Tiktok](#) (ft. Subway Surfers), one about [Phil and Kristin attempting to flirt](#), and an [accurate depiction of chapter 23](#), all done by [Ripple](#)

A [TikTok of Tommy Beating The Shit Outta Wilbur](#) (after he gets cancelled), done by [Nick](#)

[The real ending of TINAAOS](#) /j drawn by the lovely Luna

[These Theseus Designs](#) (+ an oc) drawn by [Emma](#) along with [this](#) (warning blood)

[THE TRAUMATISED MINORS™](#) done by the lovely [Al](#). Also [this lovely drawing of Techno](#), which I adore

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Purpled is at the end of the couch, he's sleeping while sitting up. He doesn't have a pillow or a blanket, Tommy realises that he's hogged the blanket and the couch.

There's pale golden light seeping through the cracks of the blinds, spilling onto the floor and right into Tommy's eyes. So that's what woke him up then, he looks up at the high ceilings, trying to remember whatever the fuck happened—

Explosion. Fundy. Phil's house.

Oh. Yeah.

Tommy sits up slowly, rubbing his eyes.

“Mhmm,” he hears. It's slightly more muffled than usual, Tommy sits up slowly. Huh. Still muffled.

Tommy drops back onto the pillow, more than willing to lie to get some information.

He realises that there's heavy footsteps, and that means it's Techno, because Techno has the heaviest footsteps known to all of mankind. Tommy buries his face into the side of the couch.

“So he's okay?” Techno asks, and Tommy holds his breath. “Well not okay, okay, but like surviving okay. Y'know?”

A pause.

Tommy looks around.

The lounge room is very nice, and the couch was a fold-out one that was bigger than his own single bed. The entire house is mostly glass windows and white walls, but inside it's... so homey it hurts.

There are photos of SBI on the wall, ones that have Fundy in them too and Tommy's heart pangs at that. There's one at a beach that is *not* in L'Manberg because the weather is good.

There's a slightly frayed rug on the floor, and a terrible drawing on one of the end tables that is signed. '*Wilbur 11.*' Tommy has no idea what it's even supposed to be. There's also a painting of a sunset in another frame. That was is labelled, '*Wilbur 13*' and Tommy's glad that his art skill improved at least slightly.

"And Fundy?" Techno asks, which makes Tommy look over. Not caring about his bad cover. "H... how is he doing?"

A pause and Techno looks in pain. "Still? What do you mean still... it's been six hours—how is he still? It's three bullets not a fuckin'—"

Techno sighs into the phone. "Okay. Okay, yes I'm calm. Yes I got sleep... maybe it was only four hours, but that's to be expected." Another pause, "Yes Tommy, Daniel and Niki are all alright, they're asleep."

Ah yes. Asleep.

"Wilbur's alright?"

Something Tommy couldn't quite make out.

"Is Fundy gonna... make it through the surgery?" He glances over at the couch and Tommy lies down a bit straighter. "How do they not know—just find a blood donor. Wilbur has the same blood type."

Another pause and Techno started passing. "Surely they're compatible..." Techno sighs, "Okay. Tommy's wakin' up, I gotta go." More pausing, where Phil (he guesses) is saying

something. “Bye, love you too.”

There’s a moment of silence.

“I know you’re awake,” Techno says, “You’ve been in and out of consciousness since two.”

“You told Phil you slept.”

“I lied.” Techno walks over, peering over the back of the couch. He looks at Tommy who’s just sorta... lying there, chilling and really living his best life. “Tommy... I need to ask you something before everything blows up.”

Tommy sits up slowly, before glancing at Purpled nervously. The fucker is very good at pretending he’s sleeping. “Yeah?”

Techno pinches the bridge of his nose. “If you lie to me now, I can not help you later. The people who attacked the gala called themselves Elysium’s Angels... correct?”

Tommy nods.

“Elysium is a Greek mythology thing. Like... Greek heaven, it’s a bit complicated, but at its core it’s like Greek Heaven, where heroes go. One of those heroes are thought to be Theseus.”

Tommy stares.

Techno sighs, “I need to know. If you have had *any* involvement with the angels— working with them, I need to know because I am already going to have to fight accusations that you’re behind this.”

“The only involvement I’ve had—” Tommy glances at Purpled. He legitimately does not know if Purpled is asleep. “Is fighting them. There is no positive relationship there, I haven’t worked with them.”

“Okay, okay,” Techno slumps slightly, “Okay. This is doable—”

“How’s Fundy?” Tommy asks slowly.

“Dunno,” Techno says, “Wil and Phil haven’t been told much since he went into surgery. Apparently he needs a blood transfer and it’s pretty bad, but we’re struggling to find anyone who has a compatible blood type.”

“They’ve found one,” Tommy says absent-mindedly. “Fundy would be dead otherwise—dunno why they haven’t told you. But they’ve found one.”

“Why the fuck do you know that?”

“I’ve spent a lot of time in hospitals,” Tommy sits up slowly, eyes still on Purpled to see if he’s actually awake. Tommy doesn’t think he is, but Purpled is like... even worse than Tubbo when it comes to these things.

Tommy yawns and looks at Techno, “How are you?” He asks, “You look... a bit stressed.”

“Yup,” Techno runs a hand down his face. “There’s been a meeting called today. A confidential one—” he gives Tommy a look. “You and Purpled can’t be there.”

“Yeah— wait, you know that Purpled... is Purpled.”

“Yeah.”

“How long?” Tommy jumps over the back of the couch and walks into the kitchen.

It really is a nice house. The kitchen is lovely, with black counters and cabinets to the side. There’s a kitchen island with a white marble top though, and it seems to just have... a lot of stuff on it.

Mostly clothes from yesterday.

Tommy realises that... he’s still in his shirt and pants before clambering up onto a kitchen stool and resting his head against the kitchen island. Nice. He could live like this, it’s cool against his forehead.

Techno sits next to him and does the same thing.

It must be an odd sight.

“Since he joined the tower,” Techno says, “I saw the way you reacted and then Purpled and Theseus started teaming up more. Then Daniel moved in with you, and I know that you’re not *that* trusting. So... guessed mostly, and then he pointed a gun at me and it made a bit more sense.”

Tommy shoots up from his seat, “Fuck. My phone!”

Techno gives him a look.

“I left my phone there, well that’s fucking compromised now. I liked that phone. Oh shit Tubbo is gonna kill me, on the spot,” he looks at Techno. “Can I please borrow your phone? Please, I need him to know I’m alive.”

Techno slides his phone across the bench.

Tommy scrambles to pick it up. “Do you have Tubbo’s contact?”

Techno nods.

“Wait what? Why do you—”

“Because we have agreed that you are an incompetent vigilante who needs to stop getting injured.”

Tommy groans, “Why can’t I keep my personal and professional life separate?”

Techno gives him a look. “You live and work with Purpled.”

“Details!” Tommy huffs, still he picks up Techno’s phone and scrolls through the contacts. Truthfully there aren’t many of them. So he finds Tubbo’s rather quickly.

Tubbo. (Slightly Terrifying)

He huffs at the contact name before ringing.

It rings for a few moments.

“TECHNOBLADE, WHERE THE FUCK IS TOMMY? IF HE’S HURT THEN I SWEAR TO FUCKING—”

“Hi Tubbo.”

A moment of silence. “*THOMAS FUCKING INNES—*”

“That’s not my name—”

“*YOU KNOW HOW STRESSFUL THE PAST SEVEN HOURS HAVE BEEN? TRYING TO GET INTO CONTACT WITH ANYONE WHO KNOWS ANYTHING? I ALMOST HACKED INTO THE TOWER’S RECORDS TO FIND A WAY TO CONTACT SPECTRE!*”

“Tubbo I’m sorry!”

“*NOT GOOD ENOUGH JACKASS!*” Tubbo screeches into the phone and Tommy holds the phone away from his ear.

“Tubbo, hear me out.”

“*Ferme la bouche !*” Tubbo yells.

Ah. French mode Tubbo.

Now unlike the movies, Tubbo doesn’t sometimes just start speaking French without knowing it. He knows exactly what he’s saying. It’s more like a ‘you really fucked up’ sign, than Tubbo’s languages slipping.

Tommy winces. He’s in proper trouble.

“*Putain! Va te faire encoder, tu sale cafard. Te bite. T’as un tête de nœud. Ta guille,*” Tubbo yells. “*T’as un tête de nœud!*”

“Tubbo hear me out—”

“Va te Faire foutre!” Tubbo yells, *“Te bite.”*

Tommy holds the phone a bit further away from his ear.

Tubbo sighs, *“Are you and Purps alright though?”*

“Yes. We’re okay,” Tommy says slowly looking over at Purpled sleeping on the couch. “I lost my phone though. I don’t think it’s worth getting it back, can you wipe it?”

“Of course,” Tubbo mutters, *“Okay. When are you coming home?”*

“Am I allowed to come home?”

Tubbo pauses for a fear-filling moment. *“Yes.”*

“Am I going to get yelled at?”

“I won’t yell at you in French,” Tubbo says, *“Ranboo might go all Mum-friend though and we’ll have to deal with that.”*

“Mhmm,” Tommy sighs, “See you then Tubbs.”

Tubbo hangs up first.

Tommy glances over to where Purpled is allegedly sleeping on the couch, “Would Purps and I be good to go now?”

“Yeah,” Techno yawns, “The heroes are gonna have a meeting.”

“Like top ten?”

“Everyone,” Techno adds, “All thirty-three heroes on the force. You’ll have most of the day off. Well... thirty, Phil, Fundy and Wilbur probably won’t be there for... obvious reasons. I’ll be representing them, I reckon.”

“Hero meetings confuse me.”

“Me too,” Techno sighs, running a hand through his hair. “It’ll be fine though, we got this Tommy. We don’t want to fight Elysium’s Angels, they clearly have roots everywhere. We need to work with them— as Sun Tzu says, ‘the supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting’.”

Tommy just stares at Techno, “You’re a fuckin’ nerd. Sun Tzu?”

“Yeah!” Techno says nodding, “I have this super old ratty copy, it’s from like... when I was ten. Never could be bothered to get a new one, it’s literally falling apart. I can’t even read it anymore cause it’s falling apart.”

“You actually read it.”

“Yeah? It’s how I learnt how to read properly.”

“Huh?”

Techno shifts slightly, “In the ring, someone would read it to me, I’d look at the words. Before the voices and stuff.”

“Didn’t you go to school before... like before the ring?”

“Probably,” Techno, “Dunno, doesn’t really matter anyway—”

There’s footsteps down the stairs and both of them look up. Niki is standing in the doorway, she looks at them. Then shrugs slightly, she hops down the stairs and throws a jacket over her shoulders.

A moment later there’s a pitter-patter down the stairs, and there he is. The man himself.

Floof.

In all his doggy glory. He looks at Techno expectantly before trotting up to him.

Techno sighs and picks up Floof. “Floofers, what are ya doing?”

“Floofers?” Niki laughs, zipping up her jacket. “Do you have a meeting after last night?”

“Yeah,” Techno sighs.

He hands Floof over to Niki. Floof looks mildly offended about the entire thing, but Techno scratches underneath his chin, and Floof seems to be okay with the new arrangement.

“See ya Tech, see ya Tommy,” Niki lifts up Floof’s paw and makes him wave with it.

Techno waves back.

“Bye, Niki.”

“Do you have a ride home?” Techno asks, “A cab, I can get something if you need.”

“Got a cab,” Niki nods. “Call me when you get home, I think you might need to see Floof.”

“Thanks, Niki.”

And like that Niki opens the door and leaves, closing the door with a quiet click as they hear Floof bark.

Tommy walks over to Purpled, before kicking the couch. “I know you’re not sleeping jackass — I know you know exactly what Tubbo said to me on that phone call.”

“Swore at you,” Purpled replies, not even opening his eyes. “He just swore. Called you a dirty cockroach, that was good.”

Tommy glares, and Purpled just smiles. Before getting off the couch. “Cool, we can leave?”

Techno nods.

“Alright,” Purpled looks at Tommy, “Subway?”

“The hit game, Subway Surfers?”

“I hate you. So much.”

“What, it’s a good game!” Tommy grins, nudging Purpled in the side. “Especially when you’re supposed to be guarding Quackity.”

“Oh fuck off,” Purpled flips him off, looking down at his phone. “See ya Technoblade.”

“That’s not even my name,” Techno mutters, “See ya.”

“Bye!” Tommy adds walking towards the door.

Purpled opens the door and walks out before Tommy.

“Uh, Tommy at the gala I grabbed—” Techno says.

Tommy turns around.

“Nevermind,” Techno waves a hand. “Get home safe.”

“Will do,” Tommy says and steps outside.

The train ride home is a hilarious one, almost.

There’s still some blood on Purpled’s suit, and he clearly doesn’t care as he plays Subway Surfers silently. People are side-eyeing both of them, Purpled who has some blood on his leg, and Tommy... who looks like he slept in this. Which he did.

Tommy has no other option to sit there... since his phone is gone.

It's not that cramped for once, and Tommy can lean slightly on Purpled. He closes his eyes, slipping in and out of sleep every time the train stops and more people get on the train or hop off the train.

Eventually Purpled shakes him awake, and essentially drags him off the train before the doors close. Then they walk to the apartment, it's not too far away. A couple of minutes of walking and they're there.

Going up the stairs, Tommy skips over the broken one before slowly opening the door to the apartment.

Tubbo is sitting there, arms crossed.

Ranboo is sitting next to him.

"What time do you call this then?" Tubbo asks.

"If you're doing the parent bit, I'm gonna kill you," Purpled says, pushing past Tommy. "I have been bled on, and would like to shower. Can I go to that?"

Ranboo nods.

Tubbo's gaze is set on Tommy. "You know how stressful these last couple hours have been? You were calling me then I heard the phone drop. Then some... I don't even know— then the call disconnected."

"I dropped my phone," Tommy defends, "That's not *my* fault. I was attacked by some guy."

Purpled stops in his tracks, looking over his shoulder. “What did he look like?”

“Uh... blond hair. White hoodie, gold chain, kinda looked like you. Said his name was Lucas Munch.”

Purpled pales, “That was Punz,” he whispers. “He attacked you?”

“Yeah, he found me snooping and then... held a gun to my spine as I waited for Wilbur to basically come and collect me.”

“Oh fuck,” Purpled puts a hand over his mouth. “Fucking— fuck!”

“Okay, okay,” Tubbo says, putting his hands up in what’s probably supposed to calm Purpled down but it doesn’t. “Less than ideal, but what’s the problem with Punz being there.”

Purpled takes a shaky breath, “He’s been hired by someone. But it’s a problem because if someone can find Punz then they can find me. Then— fuck.”

“Okay, calm down, calm,” Tubbo says, his voice isn’t very calm either. “Why can’t people find you?”

“Because I’ll be fucking murdered?” Purpled yells, “Because I have ruined a good chunk of lives and— fuck, Punz was supposed to be off the grid. Someone found him— they had to of, he hasn’t taken new work in so long—”

“How do you know this?” Ranboo asks.

Purpled closes his eyes and takes a deep breath, “People talk. Punz went off the scene— he could’ve been doing more secretive work, but someone apparently tracked him. Because this is fuckin’ high profile work, blowing up a gala. That means— that means, that whoever hired him—”

“Elysium,” Tommy adds, “It has to have been Elysium. Nothing else makes sense.”

“Could track me down the same way, and I *really* don’t want that happening. Everything’s gonna catch up to me, y’know? I don’t really want all of the gang shit to come exploding in my face.”

“Gangs?” Tommy whispers.

Tubbo gives him a look, “You also have gang shit going on.”

“I left on good terms, though,” Tommy adds, “Purpled what sorta gang shit do you have going on?”

“So much,” Purpled mutters, pacing up and down. “I did some contract stuff for rival gangs back when I was fifteen, kinda fucked up a whole operation. That’s fine— what’s not fine is that you’ll probably get dragged into this.”

Tubbo and Ranboo exchange a glance.

“Okay,” Tubbo says, “They might not even want to find you. Think about it, you’re a vigilante as well as a mercenary, you’re more likely than Punz to narc. Don’t stress about it, what we do need to stress about is how there are three hundred and twenty-seven files on a USB we don’t have.”

“Oh fuck,” Tommy mutters, “The USB. Where is it?”

“Fuck,” Purpled also adds, “I didn’t grab it.”

“Did you see it?” Tubbo asks, “Because those are pretty sensitive files with both Ranboo’s and my information on them.”

“You got your information?” Tommy asks.

“I was trying to erase it from their database, while I still had a copy. This isn’t *ideal* but I’m fine without it. Ranboo’s however, anyone could have it. There’s so many email files, and so many files about fighting ring line ups.”

Tommy starts pacing across the room, the opposite side as Purpled, “Well shit,” is what Tommy says. “So we have a missing USB, a missing phone—”

“I overloaded it,” Tubbo adds, “It’s fine. If anyone even wants to try get past the encryption, the phone’s fried.”

“Right, a missing USB.”

“Files of Ranboo that could be anywhere,” Purpled adds. “And Tubbo.”

“Shit,” Tubbo mutters, “Fucking hell, we need that USB. I have lots of information on the laptop... but it’s going to be so much more difficult. I could only get so much information before the server shut me out, that USB—”

“Well it has to be somewhere.”

“Maybe it was destroyed in the explosion?” Ranboo adds, “Or the chaos afterwards. Or by a clean-up crew. I don’t reckon anyone would’ve grabbed it, the building went up a couple of minutes after. Who would run into a burning building to grab a USB drive they didn’t even know existed.”

Tommy runs his hands through his hair, pacing a bit faster.

Best case scenario, the USB has been destroyed. Worst case scenario, someone has that USB and all of Ranboo's and Tubbo's information.

"It should be encrypted though..." Tommy adds, "It might not be worth the trouble to get through it."

Tubbo nods, "Not impossible though. Depending on resources, they could get a freelancer to —" Tubbo has a look in his eyes. Something that means he has an idea, "Okay... I can put a thing out for encryption work."

"Okay, a plan, finally," Purpled adds. "Can we track that USB?"

"No," Tubbo mutters. "Maybe if I had more warning I could've put in a tracking piece, but Tommy only gave me a day's notice."

Ranboo sighs, leaning back in his chair. "Can't something go right for us?"

"No," Tubbo mutters, "Can't have jackshit in L'Manberg."

"Okay," Tommy takes a deep breath. "Tubbo, can you find some sort of lead with the information you do have?"

"Duh," Tubbo rolls his eyes, "The encrypting is gonna be a bitch, but I can get around it."

Okay. Tommy can work with this, he can pretend he's competent and make some sort of plan around this.

Is this how Phil feels when he's bossing people around before missions? Having absolutely zero clue what he's doing? Because Tommy sure as fuck is feeling that at the second. He

sighs slightly.

It's fine.

“What happens if those files get out, realistically?”

“I get them off the internet quicker than you can blink, and trace it back to the original poster. I'll make a bot scanning for the words I know are in there, I can probably code it, to take it down automatically too.”

“There,” Tommy says. “A real plan, everything's fine. Tubbo, work on your stuff at your pace. Purpled, don't take any work for a second, or go on patrol—”

“Tommy—”

“Don't,” Tommy holds up his hand. “Okay, look, Purps— as much as I care about you. We have too much going on to be involved with gang shit, just lay low for like a week and we'll figure it out then.”

Purpled opens his mouth, “I can handle myself—”

“We're a team,” Ranboo cuts off Purpled with a look so withering that Purpled shrinks in on himself. “We all *can* handle ourselves, but it's not about that. We're a team, and we're dealing with this together, okay?”

Tubbo nods, “Boo's right. We're a team— this was clearly stressing you enough that you had to tell someone, and now we're gonna put your vigilantism on the pause for the moment. Tommy... I think you're gonna be tied with Elysium.”

“Probably, Theseus is an amazing scapegoat.”

“Just... be careful on patrol,” Ranboo adds, “Okay? And if it’s too much you’re gonna have to lay low for a while.”

Tommy sighs, before collapsing onto the couch. Purpled falls next to him and for a long moment they all sit there in complete silence.

It’s been a long day. It’s been a long couple of weeks, Tommy swears he’s aged a thousand times over. He’ll be getting grey hair at this point. He’ll almost look as old as Phil.

Ranboo and Tubbo also sit on the couch, wedging themselves on what is supposed to be a three person couch. Tommy closes his eyes, leaning on Tubbo’s shoulder slightly. Tubbo leans against him too.

“I’m havin’ a nap,” Tommy mutters.

“Same.” Tubbo returns.

That appears to be the general consensus— or it should be, because Tommy finds himself falling asleep regardless.

The hero meeting apparently goes, ‘*okay*’ in the words of Techno himself.

Tommy has to go into work the next day.

Apparently there’s a lot of media talk going on. About the whole Fundy situation and Wilbur wants Tommy to be there, to make sure Fundy isn’t getting slandered. (Even though the biggest threat is libel, rather than slander, Tommy will ignore that.)

So that's how Tommy finds himself in the seventh meeting about the wording of something. Some of the Dream Team's PR people are here too, along with one of Quackity's and two of Fundy's.

They're all lovely, it's just that it's difficult to try and word what happened to them. None of them were there, and Tommy doesn't have the mental capacity to do it himself.

"Refuse questions until we know that Outwit is well—"

"That will cause a fallout, people love Outwit, he's the youngest and everyone's underdog, they will ask questions. Or find out, it's better if we put out a press release until other less reputable sites do."

Tommy really needs a nap. He has not been sleeping well, for a reason he is still yet to figure out. It's like he's always on edge, his powers thrumming underneath his skin. He's been sleeping, yes, but not *well*.

"What would we even say?"

He should probably get some groceries on the way home, they're running out of vegetables, and Ranboo wants to try and make tacos tonight. It probably won't go well, but worse case they find Kero's taco stand and get tacos from there.

They have the taco shells and the mince, he'll need to grab some lettuce and salsa on the way home— he should really text Ranboo to make sure he doesn't have a shift. Otherwise Tommy will need to grab it, also it would be nice to have a confirmation that's what they actually need.

"That Outwit is out of commission due to the attack."

"That means Elysium's Angels win."

“They’ve already won!”

He should get an egg salad roll for lunch, or text Techno to grab him one. It’s been a while since he’s had one of them, and he knows they sell them here. He’ll let Henry know after this meeting is done. Hopefully Techno isn’t too busy, because Tommy sure as fuck is. And he’s fucking hungry.

Ranboo said he should’ve had breakfast, but no, Tommy insisted he was fine.

Now he’s hungry as fuck, it’s been... too long since he last ate. Probably dinner last night after waking up from his nap. Ranboo had made pasta, which went surprisingly well for him, it was actually kinda good.

He should probably stop thinking about food in this important meeting. But... he’s really hungry, and nothing he says will be listened to anyway. It’s a bit of a scam, but he supposes he will survive.

With a sigh, he leans back in his chair.

“Tommy?” Someone says drawing him out of his longing for food. “Do you have any input on this?”

He does not know the person who spoke to him, but he does know that he’s expected to have a response as a semi-competent employee.

“Well, Elysium’s Angels have already taken credit for the attack. There’s already images online circulating of Fundy— Outwit being taken out of City Hall, clearly injured. And our silence would imply a death, or some sort of tragedy, when to my knowledge Fundy is alright. Injured, but alright.”

“Huh.”

“We don’t need to confirm that it happened at City Hall, as well. Just report on Fundy’s injury and how long it’s estimated he won’t be working. That way, we keep everyone happy.”

There’s hums of agreement and Tommy wants to run his head into the wall. Repeatedly too. Just... over and over again, that would probably hurt less. They took an hour? Discussing, just for a sixteen-year-old thinking about an egg salad roll to make the decision—

This country is a fucking joke.

Okay, Tommy’s had enough. He wants an egg salad roll from Techno. And he wants to stop thinking about specific wordings of a phrase. He also wants to stop talking to all these people with fucking degrees.

Like, they’re smart. Great. They did public relations and marketing degrees, Tommy’s a teenager who did complete high school. These fucking degree people with their superiority complexes.

Tommy looks down at his phone, “Oh sorry, Techno needs me. Quite urgently.”

“That’s alright,” someone says and gives him a smile. It’s the same person who asked for his input, maybe not all degree people are *that* bad. (Just most of them.) “Duty calls, thank you!”

“Thanks for having me, it was a pleasure,” he lies, before standing up, grabbing his bag and fucking bolting. He opens his chat with Techno

Literal Child: .

either, i sue for damages .
or you get me an egg salad roll .

Literal Pig:

k. see you then

Ah. Techno, what a great texter with a lot of variety.

Tommy laughs to himself and walks to the closest elevator. He opens Twitter, Twitter is handling the Fundy thing surprisingly well, Tommy doesn't have to go and yell at them all. They are speculating, but that's more than fine.

The elevator dings and rises, Tommy's eyes still on his phone.

Sure enough, he's at the floor he wants to be at. Not quite at the living area, due to taking a different elevator. But he walks down the hallway into the main living area. There are a couple of people at the kitchen bench.

Tommy does not know these people, he realises.

"Hi," Tommy says, putting his bag on the bench.

"G'day," someone says, nodding and Tommy does the bro-nod back.

Tommy sits up on the kitchen bench, swinging his legs and looking at his phone.

He tunes out the people behind him, who are talking and generally appearing to have a good time. He scrolls through Twitter, making sure no one's already reported on Fundy's disappearance, no, they have not.

The elevator opens and Techno walks in, holding an egg salad roll.

He throws it at Tommy, and Tommy manages to catch it. Unwrapping it before biting into it. It's good.

"People prepare food there," Techno deadpans, sitting on the stool next to him.

"Sitting on the bench is superior," Tommy's mouth is full of lettuce and bread, and Techno winces. "That meeting, was so fucking boring— I hate rich people—"

"With their fuckin' beach shacks," Techno adds and Tommy nods.

"Overseas holidays—"

The elevator opens, and Tommy looks up.

It's Wilbur.

The first thing Tommy notices about Wilbur is just how awful he looks. Not even jokingly, Wilbur legitimately looks terrible. He's paler than usual, his eyes are sunken and dull. His hair is... incredibly unwashed and slightly matted and tangled.

Techno and him exchange a glance.

Ah. This really isn't good then.

"Wil?" Techno asks.

Wilbur holds up a hand, walking over to the bench. Before chugging the rest of his coffee and setting it down. "I have not slept in two days."

“Oh shit,” Techno says, “Wilbur you need to sleep.”

“I’ve been trying!” Wilbur yells, he runs his hands through his hair and they get slightly caught on the knots. “I have been trying, I just *can’t*. And I haven’t even collapsed yet, and I need to keep coming to work—”

“No you don’t,” Tommy adds, taking a munch out of his salad roll. “You can... just, not. Call in sick, just spend a day doin’ nothin’.”

“I have work to do.”

“You’re not getting anything done,” Techno says, it’s not said with as much bite as Techno would probably use any other time. “Wil, please go home. I know Fundy and the whole Elysium Angels thing is freaking you out.”

“Tech—”

“I know, trust me Wilbur. I know. But you’re not going to be any use to anyone if you haven’t slept. I know you need less sleep than the average person, but you still need at least *some* sleep.”

“Tech— I *can’t*. ” Wilbur stresses, looking at Tommy. “This isn’t a matter of me not trying. I’ve been trying to sleep, I just can’t. What if something happens to Fundy? Or what if someone attacks the tower or—”

“Hey, hey, hey,” Techno says, looking at Wilbur then glancing at Tommy. “No one’s attacking the tower.”

Tommy bites into his salad roll. It’s pretty good, all things considered. They boiled the egg nicely.

“Someone already has!”

“Wil,” Tommy says from around his roll. He finishes the bit he was eating and sighs, “You really need to chill man—”

“Oh thank you Tommy!” Wilbur says, throwing his hands up in the air. “That is really fucking helpful. If *only* I had thought of that!”

“There was more to that,” Tommy shrugs and bites into his roll. He’s running out of the roll, and that means he’ll need to involve himself in the conversation more. Something he is not qualified to do.

Techno sighs, pushing off the counter, “Where are the sleeping meds?”

“They make me go all funny.”

“That’s the point of them Wilbur.”

“My powers get weaker—”

“That’s also the point, Wilbur. We don’t want you phasing through the floor when you’re tired.”

“I do that once!”

“It is not once,” Phil supplies.

Wilbur turns around, looking over his shoulder and at Phil. Then back at Techno with a murderous glare on his face. Ah. Techno snitched. Wilbur stands up a bit taller and spins around to Phil.

“Hi, Dad.”

“Hi, son,” Phil deadpans back. “Techno, Tommy.”

Tommy gives a two finger salute.

“How’s the research going?” Wilbur asks, “Are there any leads with Theseus?”

“No,” Phil pulls a face. He looks at Techno, something heavy in his gaze. “You said if you thought Theseus was a threat, you’d hand him in?”

Techno nods.

“And you really don’t believe Theseus has any involvement with the angels?”

“No,” Techno says with little hesitation. “I mean, all of their suspected attack locations where Theseus have been, have ended up with Theseus apprehending the attackers. It doesn’t really make sense.”

“He could be leading us off his trail—”

“You think he’s that smart?” Tommy laughs, he snorts, “Yeah, okay.”

Wilbur looks at Phil, then at Techno. Then at Tommy. “You know Theseus?”

“He’s literally my arch nemesis,” Tommy deadpans, he takes a bite out of the salad roll, mostly to look dramatic. “Yes, I know Theseus.”

“Like personally?”

Techno facepalms slightly.

“Nah, I mean we talked on Twitter once.”

Wilbur and Phil look at each other.

“What?” Phil says.

“Y’know—” Tommy says, judging by their expressions, they do not know. “Y’know Wilbur hasn’t had his sleeping meds.”

Ah foolproof topic change.

Wilbur looks at him with betrayed eyes.

“Wil?” Phil asks, with nothing but fondness and kindness in his voice. He can almost see Wilbur crumble under the soft tone, because he looks even madder at Tommy.

Phil puts an arm around Wilbur’s shoulders and Wilbur basically melts into the half-hug.

“Makes my powers weaker,” Wilbur mutters.

“It doesn’t matter. You’re more important than your powers.”

“Higher ups disagree,” Wilbur mutters. He crosses his arms and shakes off Phil’s arm. “Look, my powers are functioning the best they have in a couple of months. I can obviously sustain this, what’s the harm?”

“The harm is,” Techno leans back against the counter. “Is that you’re tearing yourself apart inside out. And we’re not going to sit-by and let it happen. We care about you too much for that.”

Tommy looks down at his feet. His shoelaces probably need replacing, they have the money now. It’s really good if they get that stuff now, rather than later. They got things to do, places to be.

“I am fine!” Wilbur says, “Seriously. The coffee has set in and everything’s fine—”

Techno hits himself in the forehead. “I am three seconds away from holding you down and sedating you.”

Phil nods approvingly.

Wilbur just gives him a look. “I’ll fuckin’ bite you.”

“I know. I have the scars to prove it,” Techno sighs. Before giving Wilbur a look, it’s one that’s filled with a disgusting amount of care. “Go to sleep Wil, or at least lay down. That’s better than nothing.”

“Fine!” Wilbur throws his arms up in the air, he spins around. “I’ll go lay down.”

Techno nods approvingly, and then he follows after Wilbur.

That leaves Phil and Tommy. Tommy is done with his egg-salad roll and he doesn't have anything to do if he wants to avoid awkward conversation. Phil shakes his head, before sitting on the stool next to him.

"How's research actually goin'?" Tommy asks and Phil snorts, "I know you probably aren't allowed to tell me but, just making conversation."

"It's alright, I trust you."

Ah. Ouch. Okay then.

Tommy nods, refusing to look at Phil.

"It's alright," Phil eventually says. "Very few leads. We have a motive, and we have a couple of potential leads, but it's difficult to find who's at the top of an organisation like this. They're threats though."

"Yeah..." Tommy mutters, "They don't sound like good news, that's for sure."

"Yeah..." Phil says slowly, "And the only other relation to Greek Mythology is Theseus, but Techno's very sure it's not him. We have no reason to believe it either, the only evidence says it's not him."

"Yup," Tommy adds. "Shock."

"What does that mean?"

Tommy shrugs, "I dunno— whatever you think it should mean."

Phil looks at him for a moment, before realising dropping it's the best option. So that's what he does, Tommy picks up his phone and scrolls through Twitter for a moment, for no reason at all.

Tommy takes a deep breath. Yeah. He's going to have to cover those tracks, as much as he doesn't want to.

"Sorry, it's just this whole thing that really has me on edge."

It's not really a lie. Because, it does. Something about it just has Tommy on... edge, he can't describe it in any other way than that. There feels like there's more, and he just can't fucking see the whole picture.

Phil nods, "Yeah... it'll be alright though."

"Mhmm," Tommy looks down again. "Let's hope so."

"We're doing a training session in a couple of minutes," Phil says slowly, looking at Tommy with something in his eyes. Tommy would call it concern if he was slightly weaker. "You can come and watch if you want, you might learn something."

"Can I invite Daniel?" Tommy asks.

"Don't see why not," Phil shrugs.

"Ayo, Henry, my man!" Tommy looks up to the roof.

The AI has the audacity to *sigh* at him. Which feels a bit classist in his humble opinion.
"Hello, Thomas. What can I do for you today?"

“Hi, Henry,” Tommy says, “When that training thing happens today, I would very much appreciate it if Daniel was there..”

“Of course, Thomas,” Henry says and Tommy smiles at that. “Considering you, Phil, were supposed to be there approximately four minutes ago. I would recommend you leave for the training room.”

“Oh shit!” Phil stands up, “C’mon Tommy.”

Tommy stands up and follows after Phil. He walks into the elevator and takes a deep breath. Before looking down at his phone, where he promptly busies himself with annoying Theseus stans on Twitter.

It’s honest work, but someone has to do it.

They get to Phil’s selected floor, and Phil basically runs out.

Tommy walks, eyes still glued to his phone. He manages to move out of the way of someone running to catch the elevator, before turning the corner and opening a door. When did Tommy get so good at multitasking?

He has no clue.

Walking in he stares.

It is a... fucking huge room, with stuff everywhere. To one side is a slightly springy looking mat, there he can see a couple of people already sparring. He has absolutely no clue why there are so many people here.

There are thirty-three people on the hero's task force. Yet there appear to be a lot more here, he supposes that some people are guards and others might just want to watch.

"Say the line, say the line," someone says and Tommy looks around.

It's Melicertes, wearing a shark hoodie. It looks like a shark is eating him, but that's alright.

Someone with brown hair and a flannel shirt (why is he wearing flannel?). He groans and shakes his head. "No way!"

"You did it before!"

"That was for a bet, you were horrified the entire time."

"Come on," someone else says, they have blondish-brownish hair. That weird sort of middle which depended on the light. "You were training me, remember."

"Your brand is literally a cat!"

"My *mask* has cat ears on it, that's a different point."

"You don't even need a mask!"

"I like my privacy," they argue, before looking up at Tommy. "Hi!"

"Hi," Tommy gives a wave, "Uh... Foolish, what are you talking about?"

Foolish rolls his eyes, and Tommy walks over.

“This is HBomb,” he gestures at the man in the flannel shirt. “That’s Ant... don’t question the name.”

“Everyone *does* have weird names here,” Tommy says. “Like is that the name on your birth certificate?”

This ‘Ant’ person, who is not an Ant. He looks like some sort of feline hybrid with long claw-like nails, and a sharper face than most. He sighs and shakes his head, “No, it’s not. But it’s what everyone calls me.”

Foolish throws an arm around HBomb’s shoulders, “Mister H, over here, once got paid... how much was it?”

“A thousand dollars,” HBomb mutters.

“To dress up in a maid outfit and follow me around for a day, it was—” Foolish shudders, “Traumatic. Being a hero? That’s not true trauma—”

“Soot would have to disagree,” Ant deadpans.

Foolish bursts out laughing, before hitting him in the arm. “You can’t just say that.”

“I mean... I *can*. ”

“HBomb, say the line,” Foolish says, looking at HBomb and shaking him slightly. “You had no trouble saying it last week.”

“I’m not saying the line—”

“Say the line!”

It’s quiet for a moment.

Tommy then sees that Foolish, Ant and HBomb are looking at someone behind him, and Tommy turns around.

“Tommy,” Sam says. He can’t see Sam’s face under the mask but he can tell by his voice that he’s smiling. Probably pretty wide too. “Hi.”

He’s almost grateful for Sam’s arrival even though it’s slightly confusing because It’s Sam. He’s generally the behind the scene sorta dude, so it’s almost funny that he’s here.

“Sam! Hey!”

“Look you scared him off—” HBomb says.

“Good,” Ant deadpans, “He’s like nineteen.”

Sam looks at the three of them, before putting an arm around Tommy’s shoulders and leading him away slowly.

Tommy almost laughs at it, it’s something Techno would do.

“So,” Sam says.

“So,” Tommy deadpans.

“The gala?”

“Oh yeah, that— sure happened.”

Sam pauses, before putting both hands on Tommy’s shoulders and looking him in the eyes. Tommy can’t help but make eye contact back, and he can see legitimate concern in them. It almost makes him cry.

“If you need anything,” Sam says, “Tell me. I’m not going to judge, I’m not going to tell.”

“I— thanks,” Tommy whispers.

“Okay,” Sam says, some tension in his shoulders disappearing. “Seriously, I’m not just saying that. You’re a good kid and... I know Phil and Wilbur aren’t always the most welcoming.”

Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit. Cover. Cover. Cover.

“What does that even mean—”

“We’re starting!” Puffy yells, somehow her voice booms over all the chaos and the yelling. Which is honestly just impressive, and another reason why Puffy is the coolest person in the world.

Among many reasons, many reasons why Puffy is the coolest and this is merely one of... at least a hundred, that’s a conservative guess too.

Sam sighs, before walking over.

“Oi,” Techno says behind him.

“What the fuck do you want?”

“Why are you here, ya fuck.”

“‘Cause Philza said I could.” Tommy says, sticking his tongue out at Techno.

Techno rolls his eyes, before walking past him and into the small huddle that’s formed around Puffy.

Purpled stands next to him a moment later, arms crossed and glaring. “Wanna place bets on who will win?”

“Hmm,” Tommy looks over the crowd. “Dream.”

“What?” Purpled laughs, “Phil is literally the number one hero.”

“That’s not just about fighting though, that’s about leadership qualities— imagine the uproar if Dream was the number one hero. They always freak out when he’s number two or three.”

Purpled rolls his eyes, “Say what you want, but Phil is talented.”

“Not talented enough to catch two sixteen-year-olds.”

Purpled bursts out laughing, cackling in fact.

Everyone turns around to face them and Purpled's expression immediately drops to a solemn one and he looks at Tommy like he just killed Floof.

"Tommy, shut up," Techno says.

"Oi, ya prick. I'll take you in a fight, both hands behind my back. And I'd win."

Everyone laughs apart from three people.

Purpled, Techno and Tommy. They all know it's true.

Techno looks slightly nervous and turns around so he's looking at Puffy and everyone follows suit. This means that Tommy glares at Purpled, before flicking him in the side of the head.

Purpled ignores him.

Tommy does it again.

"I will throw you into the floor," Purpled says after a third time.

"I will fake cry, and everyone here likes me more than you."

"Quackity likes me more."

"Shut up, no he doesn't."

“Fundy likes me more.”

“Lies and slander.”

“Tubbo likes me more.”

“Now *that* is simply not correct.”

“Sam likes me more.”

“No he doesn’t,” Tommy flicks Purpled in the cheek again and Purpled slowly looks at him. The most exhausted expression that Tommy has ever seen on his face. “He just said if I needed anything I could talk to him.”

“He says that to everyone—”

“Does not!”

Apparently Puffy has explained the rules, because the group disbands. Three pairs hop onto the mats. Taking off their shoes (which is rather polite.)

One is Phil and... Skeppy... maybe, he thinks that’s Skeppy at least. With black hair and diamond encrusted skin, and the blue hoodie that is in literally all of his photos. Tommy and Purpled glance at each other.

The next pair is Quackity and HBomb. HBomb is grinning widely and Quackity looks slightly nervous despite being the eighth best hero, and HBomb is the... for some reason Tommy wants to say fourteenth.

And the final pair is two people Tommy doesn't know. One of them has a... Captain America mask on? And a brown hoodie, they're looking around before their gaze settles on the person in front of them. Someone with long purple hair and black horns sticking out of it, grinning widely, before she cracks her knuckles.

"Are they new?" Tommy asks.

"Nah," Purpled shakes his head, "Minx, she's more undercover, under the table stuff and Callahan is mostly behind the scenes. He works with Sam."

"Why do you know more people than me?"

"I'm better than you," Purpled supplies easily.

"Okay, asshole."

Techno trudges over to them, before sitting against the wall. Tommy joins him and Purpled begrudgingly does the same afterwards. Again, it's almost funny. Techno sighs, before looking at Tommy.

"I don't get to fight."

"Huh?"

Techno sighs, long and tired. "Strength, they don't want me hurting anyone. I can't fight Phil because of his bird bones. Or Quackity because he's weak as it is, let alone bird bones."

"He's an avian?"

“His mum is,” Techno says, “Y’know I think Quackity is the only person on the force with a good relationship with his parents.”

“Oh?”

“They call like everyday,” Techno explains, “Maybe Skeppy does...”

“So out of thirty-three people, only two have healthy relationships with their family?” Tommy asks.

“Yup.”

“Six percent,” Purpled mutters and both of them look at him. “What? It’s basic maths. Times both by three. Technically it’s... six point zero six.”

Both of them look at him.

“Come on, it’s basic maths. Don’t tell me you couldn’t figure that out. Don’t the heroes need to pass some sort of maths exam? To... get into the program?”

“I was exempted,” Techno mutters.

“I could not be bothered to do that maths,” Tommy sighs.

“Well what number do you need to times by to get thirty-three as close to one-hundred as possible—”

“You are a nerd,” Techno says.

Purpled shakes his head and shrugs.

“Start!” Puffy yells, which cuts them away from their debate over if Purpled is a nerd. (The answer is yes, it’s always yes.)

Phil moves forwards with a practiced grace, Skeppy does a backflip away before kicking out his leg. Phil grabs it before lifting Skeppy off the ground and throwing him. He twists in the air before landing on his feet.

He turns around before lunging back at Phil. Tommy sighs and leans on Purpled’s shoulder. Purpled (shockingly enough.) Let’s him stay there, and Tommy watches as Skeppy and Phil fight.

It’s a good fight, he knows that. Their movements are practiced and almost perfect. Like a dance, except Phil’s just a little bit faster, he’s known the moves for a little bit longer. Making Skeppy go on the offensive.

However... it’s just a very clean fight, it’s not boring. It’s just, that Tommy has thought of a couple of ways to end this quicker. Tugging on Phil’s wings would collapse him pretty quickly, as would tugging on the mat.

The mat is several bits of mat, so if Skeppy got to the end of one of them and tugged the mat out from Phil’s feet, then that fight would be over. Phil’s balance is slightly too far forward as well.

That might because of the wings he has to lug around with him, but Tommy is pretty sure that you could just swipe his feet out from under him when he advances. Because all of his weight moves forward with one of his steps—

You could just swipe them out.

Tommy looks at Purpled, who's watching the Quackity and HBomb fight with seemingly vested interest. Instead he leans over to Techno.

"Sweep out Phil's legs," Tommy whispers, "His balance is off."

"You fight him then," Techno mutters absentmindedly.

Tommy considers it.

Techno looks back at Tommy, "You're not actually considering it, right?"

"No..." Tommy lies, "I'm just saying. I could get Phil to advance then swipe out his leg and shove him."

Techno just gives him a look.

He shakes his head before looking back at the Phil and Skeppy fight.

Tommy also looks back.

Phil picks Skeppy up and throws him into the mat. Skeppy makes a small noise and lays on the mat for a moment longer. "Fuck," is what Skeppy says, before standing up.

He walks over in their direction. Techno snickers and Skeppy flips him off. "I literally hate you," Skeppy snaps. "At least I'm allowed to fight him."

"At least I'm in the top ten heroes."

“You are the worst.”

“Mhmm,” Techno rolls his eyes.

Skeppy glares and flips them off.

“Tommy here has a plan to beat Phil,” Techno says.

“Oh?” Skeppy says.

“No, no I don’t—”

“He does,” Techno adds.

Tommy glares.

The next fighters are called up.

The pairs are... Sam and Puffy, Sapnap and Dream and George and the Callahan dude from before.

“It’s on,” Callahan signs.

Hey, someone here knows sign. That’s cool.

George just grins, “*Bring it on reindeer boy.*”

Oh! They both know sign language, that’s cool.

“Huh,” Tommy says.

“What?” Techno asks.

“How many people here know sign language?”

“Uh,” Techno scans around. “Me, Wil, Phil, Fundy. George, Dream, Quackity, Sapnap... uh, Puffy and Sam do, I think Skeppy knows bits. Most people can ask basic questions.”

“Oh, that’s super cool,” Tommy says.

“Callahan’s deaf,” Techno explains, “That’s why most people know sign. We gotta talk to our teammates.”

“That’s cool,” Tommy says quietly.

“Yeah, it is.”

“Does everyone know about your prosthetic?”

“Yeah,” Techno yawns, “Well— I haven’t hid it, so. Maybe.”

Tommy nods, “So you have a blade prosthetic though, or something other than that.”

“Nah,” Techno yawns.

Tommy looks at him, eyes wide. “What do you mean you don’t have— you’re not supposed to wear that one for running and moving.”

“I know.”

“Huh?” Tommy shrieks, “Wha’dya mean—”

“I mean... no one really cares, it’s fine.”

“People do care!” Tommy says, “Dude what the fuck?”

“I thought they knew?” Techno mumbles.

Tommy stares at him for a long moment, before settling on opening and closing his mouth, “Huh?”

“Well, I got my first one in the fighting ring. The socket was dodgy at best.”

“Transfemoral amputation,” Tommy nods.

“Yeah,” Techno blinks a few times. “So it’s a shuttle lock, I think that’s what it’s called. Because it’s above the knee, so the... sock thing has a metal pin that you lock into the actual prosthetic.”

“Huh. Can it come loose?”

“I mean it can, but that’s generally a problem with the fit. But yeah, I got my first one in the fighting ring. And it never got adjusted, then I got out and... that caused a couple of problems. Had nowhere to get one.”

“Yeah but now you do—”

“I don’t *need* a new one though.”

“It’s fuckin’ up your leg.”

Purpled sighs, “Techno, get a new leg. That one’s not good for exercise and if it’s hurting you anyway—”

“Wait a second!” Tommy yells, causing a couple people to look at them. “When I first met you, you looked like you had the shit beaten outta you. You had a limp.”

Techno sighs.

“That was just your leg fucking you up, wasn’t it?”

“Tommy—”

“I thought you had another one!”

“I—” Techno sighs, “Okay, I’ll talk to Sam about it, alright? I don’t want you stressing about this, you have enough going on.”

“Did you just...” Purpled looks at them, “Tommy you basically guilted the man into self-care.”

Techno sighs. He crosses his arms and looks ahead, glaring slightly. “I’ll talk to Sam about it.”

“Promise?”

“Promise.”

Purpled throws his hands in the air, “Like ten years of unhealthy habits with his prosthetic is erased like that.”

“I didn’t know anyone cared that much,” Techno mumbled. “I’ll talk to Sam.”

“Cool!” Tommy grins, leaning back against the wall. Techno glares a little bit, but Tommy will count this as an absolute win, it’s a big way for the Tommy community, and this is a win that he will be celebrating.

The fights continue.

Puffy slams Sam into the mat and everyone goes quiet.

Sam clearly had the air knocked outta him, and coughs loudly. Everyone’s quiet for a moment, before Techno cups his hands around his mouth.

“Simply just breathe, loser!”

Immediately Sam manages to sit up and look at Techno, “You come fight her then!”

“Not allowed,” Techno grins, “Higher-ups think I’m a threat to myself *and* others. It's quite a fun combination. While simultaneously giving me no space to learn how to control my powers well enough.”

Everyone looks at him.

“Woo!” Techno yells, “Sam got his ass kicked!”

“Yeah!” Tommy yells.

And like that everything... well isn’t back to normal, but there aren’t as many eyes on them.

Especially as Sam approaches them, he does so slowly, with his arms above his head and he’s clearly still trying to breathe. He glares slightly at Techno, before looking at Tommy and sighing.

“Sam,” Techno says, “Uh. I gotta talk to you about my prosthetic. Not... right now, but like to slot it into your busy schedule?”

“Yup,” Sam mutters. “Uh... I think I’m free tomorrow? What’s up with your prosthetic, I’m not a doctor, it might be best if you go to a doctor.”

“Not a doctor thing,” Techno mutters, he gestures down at his leg, “This isn’t exactly an exercise one.”

“Duh.”

“Uh... yeah, I need one I can have while fighting.”

Sam just looks at him, blinking a few times. “You’re kiddin’ me?” His accent drops, and Tommy swears to everything out there there’s a hint of Logstedchire there. “You’ve fought on *that* the entire time?”

“Well not *this* one every time, but yeah I’ve fought on this one before.”

Sam takes a deep breath, “Techno—”

“It’s fine! My leg isn’t even that sore.”

“Now I just *know* you’re lying.”

Techno huffs and crosses his arms, “I thought everyone knew.”

“And we were just making you deal with it?”

“I thought someone would know something about prosthetics,” Techno mutters.

“I—” Sam looks from Techno to Tommy, “We don’t ever want you to be in pain, Tech... I thought you had one for exercise.”

“Mhmm.”

Sam sighs, “Yes, I’ll make you a better one.”

“Thank you.”

They're silent for a bit longer as someone else walks on the mat, it's the Callahan person from earlier. Phil is also on the mat, jumping from leg to leg. Tommy sighs.

"His balance is so bad! It's too far forward, he's overcompensating for his wings!"

Sam looks at him, eyes narrowed. "You sayin' you could take him in a fight?"

"Go!" Puffy yells, and Phil darts forwards.

"Yeah," Tommy mutters, "I think I fuckin' am. Look at him! And he stutter steps too, it would be so easy to sweep out his foot. Look, he'll stutter-step—"

Sure enough, Phil stutter-steps, and Sam's eyebrows shoot up before he turns back to face Tommy. "Impressive."

"He looks like he's going to take off, that's why he's so light on his feet. Which works, but he's not trying to get in the air."

"He's not allowed to fly," Sam says.

"Still he can glide and dart around in the air. He's not fighting to his complete advantage—"

Phil ducks under a punch, before managing to twist the outstretched arm behind his back. Callahan hits the mat twice and Phil lets up.

"*Good job, mate,*" Phil signs.

"*Thank you,*" Callahan signs back before shaking out his arms and walking off the mat.

“Oh for fuck’s sake!” Tommy complains, “Callahan was at the edge of the mat, *surely* he could’ve pulled the mat out from under Phil’s feet, you can pick up the sections of mat. Why not do that?”

“Because... it’s not right?” Sam tries.

“That isn’t a rule,” Techno adds. “That would work very well for Sam or I, who are heavier on our feet. Might not work for Phil though—”

Tommy narrows his eyes before looking at Phil, he’s talking to someone he doesn’t recognise before nodding and laughing loudly. It’s not that Phil’s a bad fighter, he’s not, he’s amazing.

It’s that there’s something so obviously wrong with his fighting style and apparently no one else has caught onto it because they’re watching his wings and his fancy footwork. And the grace of his movements.

If Tommy... did take on Phil and win, (as Tommy, not Theseus.) It would be legendary, and it would be a nice bit of comeuppance for the whole building thing, and... just generally making his life more difficult.

Part of him is tempted.

Okay, every part of him is tempted.

Techno taps him on the shoulder, “Tommy?”

“Yeah?” Tommy asks, “What’s up?”

Techno and Sam exchange a glance. “You good there?”

“Zoned out,” Tommy says, looking back at Phil. “I reckon I could take him.”

“Oh, do you now,” Sam laughs.

“I reckon,” Tommy glances back at Phil. He’s taller than Phil, so he has that obvious advantage. That means if Phil stepped forward Tommy would be able to reach Phil before Phil could reach him.

Anyway, if everything goes badly he’ll grab Phil’s wings and pretend to have a trauma response to a fighting scenario—

Something about that feels ethically wrong.

Eh. It’s probably fine.

The training session continues, and because everyone in this fucking tower is a nosy fuck. Soon enough everyone knows that Tommy thinks he can take Phil in a fight, and... Tommy’s not gonna disagree.

Eventually Puffy and Phil find out.

And so that’s the short story to Puffy coming up to Tommy.

“Hey Tommy,” Puffy says and Tommy nods. “So, everyone’s pretty excited to see you and Phil fight.”

“Me too.”

“Oh, cool,” Puffy says, “You wanna?”

Tommy nods.

“Nice, I’ll tell Phil to play nice.”

“You don’t have to,” Tommy says with a polite smile.

Purpled looks at him like he’s insane.

“I will anyway,” Puffy laughs, “If he hurts you, it’s a bit different to if he hurts one of us.”

“He won’t hurt me,” Tommy laughs, “I’d cancel him.”

Puffy snorts and walks off.

Purpled looks at him like he’s lost his mind which... thinking about the gala, and several other life events. Then maybe, he *might* be losing it, but that’s okay. Happens to the best. Purpled grabs Tommy by the arm and tugs him closer, “What the fuck?” Purpled says.

“Huh?”

“You *want* the spotlight, so many things could go wrong.”

“It’ll be fine,” Tommy whispers back, pointedly trying to make sure Techno doesn’t hear. “If I think anything’s going bad, I’ll just start crying.”

Purpled gives him a look. “Make him approach you.”

Tommy nods, before standing up.

He takes off his Philza shoes, and for good measure takes off The Blade hoodie that Wilbur threw at him that one time Techno dropped coffee on him. Same time he got the Philza shoes actually.

His arms do have scars on them, just little ones. Little burn scars, from where knives have nicked his arms. It’s not that big of a deal. He’s just wearing a black t-shirt, it does have a tiny rip in it from where a moth went ham that one time.

He’s also wearing jeans.

Sad day for the Tommy community.

Phil is looking at him, a fond smile on his face. And while that’s very sweet and very caring — Tommy is going to kick his ass.

He wants to be the talk of the tower for the next decade, he wants to be that conversation over coffees in the morning about the time an officer worker fucking decked the number one hero at the time.

That’s the goal.

He steps onto the mat.

Phil looks relaxed, good.

Tommy waves, “Hey, Phil.”

“Hi, Toms,” it’s pretty muffled but Phil’s a fair enough distance away. “Heard you were talkin’ shit?”

“Always,” Tommy says, looking at Puffy.

Puffy looks slightly scared, she holds her arms up in the air, silencing the chatter.

“Today we have Thomas Underscore, our social media intern—”

“Employee. Not an intern.”

“Really?” Puffy asks looking at Tommy, “I thought you were an intern?”

“Why does everyone— no, I’m not a fuckin’ intern.”

“Thomas Underscore, our not intern. Instead SBI social media—”

“Manager. Director. Whatever,” Tommy waves a hand, “I work in a fuckin’ office.”

“You heard it here first, folks!” Puffy announces and everyone cheers, “Next up we have Philza, the man himself. Phil, I need you to play nice because if you hurt Tommy we could get sued.”

“Nah,” Tommy scrunches up his nose, “Do your best Phil, that way it won’t look so pathetic when you inevitably lose.”

The crowd collectively loses it, even Puffy smiles into her hand. Phil somehow manages to smile the brightest

“Holy fuck, he’s already destroyed him!” Someone calls out.

“Neb, shut the fuck up!” Someone yells back.

“Fuck you!” They yell, but do shut up.

Tommy grins.

“Phil, play nice. Tommy... good luck.”

“Won’t need it,” Tommy says and steps forward.

Phil has apparently decided to do the same thing, because for a long moment they circle each other. Like sharks, apart from the fact one of them really wants to win and the other is apathetic to it.

Tommy smiles a bit brighter.

“Come on, mate,” Phil says slowly. “You’re not scared?”

“Petrified,” Tommy replies.

Phil’s balance is still too far forwards. Tommy takes a couple steps around, and he fixes up the positioning of his hands. He can basically already hear Purpled lecturing him about how fucking terrible his form is.

Okay, Phil is more patient than Tommy has given credit for.

He can do this though, just taunt Phil into making the first offensive move. Then hopefully, if everything went well he'd be a legend.

“You know, tying to an office employee is rather embarrassing,” Tommy says slowly, they're still circling around an invisible point. Phil looks relaxed. “If we keep doing this then surely we'll have to stop the fight.”

Phil steps forwards, he doesn't stutter-step.

He takes another step forward.

There's about one step distance between them now, Tommy takes a deep breath. If this goes wrong then he'll just start crying. That is both a threat, and a promise.

Phil takes the final step forwards.

Tommy kicks Phil's front leg with the side of his foot, before moving forwards slightly and shoving Phil's shoulder.

Phil hits the mat.

It's quiet for a long moment.

Before the room erupts into various yelling, applause and general chaos. Tommy just grins and looks down at Phil.

Phil is also grinning though, and that makes everything a little bit better. “Good job, mate.”

“Thanks,” Tommy manages to say over the screaming around him. “Said I’d win, old man.”

Phil snorts, before getting onto his feet and brushing invisible dust off his shirt. He grins at Tommy, “Great job, kid.”

“Your balance is wrong,” Tommy explains, “You’re leaning too far forwards because of your wings. No one else caught onto it and that was annoying me.”

“Holy fuck!” Someone yells, “Philza just got fucking decked!”

“Shut up Neb!”

“Fuck you Pistol!”

Tommy sighs and turns around so he’s looking at Techno. His arms are crossed, he looks mad, but Tommy knows better. There’s the start of a smile on his face, Purpled is standing next to him with a huge thumbs up.

It’s been a pretty good day, all things considered.

Techno and Purpled walk over to them

Techno pushes past someone before putting a hand on Tommy’s shoulder. “Good job, Padawan.”

“Padawhat?”

Purpled pulls a face, “You haven’t seen Star Wars?”

“No?”

“We gotta change that tonight,” Purpled mutters, “It will change your life.”

“You’re a Star Wars nerd?” Techno asks.

Purpled glares at Techno, “Maybe.”

Phil clears his throat, before looking at Tommy. There’s fondness in his eyes, and Tommy is apparently weak because he thinks that’s alright. “Seriously, good job. Might’ve hurt my ego a bit, but you stuck to your word.”

“Huh?”

“You said you could fight me,” Phil says smiling, “And then you did. Stuck by your words, that’s a pretty rare thing to do. Even Wilbur would’ve backed down.”

“Wilbur is a bitch,” Tommy waves his hand, somehow like that explains everything. Considering Phil and Techno snort, he’s not exactly wrong for that.

People start filtering out of the room, chattering among themselves. Some people glanced at Tommy before talking even louder with more exaggerated hand movements. There are a lot of people looking at him, and he doesn’t exactly like it, but he can tolerate it.

“Tech, we have that meeting.”

“Now?” Techno mutters, “Come on.”

Phil shrugs and heads towards the door, Techno follows after him.

More people filter out of the room, some people giving congratulations to him or asking Henry for the recording of that fight which... valid, yeah, he understands that a bit too well. Quackity gives him one of those bro-slaps on the back, before a high five. The Minx girl just laughs really loudly, saying something that he can't quite hear and Tommy gives an awkward laugh in response.

"Could you not understand her accent?" Purpled asks as Minx walks off.

"Uh... just couldn't hear her."

"Huh," Purpled says.

More people talk to him and grinning as they do so.

Then the room is empty, almost completely. Both Tommy and Purpled are standing on the mats.

"We should spar."

"What? No?"

Tommy grins, tilting his head to the side. Purpled gives him a look. "Come on old man, let's tango."

"I just don't think you could tango even if you wanted to—"

“You know how to tango?”

Purpled scoffs, “Of course I know how to tango.”

“Wait really?”

Purpled nods. “Tubbo can tango too. I know Wilbur knows how to waltz,” Purpled grins and holds out his hand, “Yeah, let’s tango. A dance you don’t know how to do.”

“It’s a saying, *Purpled* .” Tommy mutters, he stretches up and down. Before shaking out his hands, for a moment he just sighs. A very tired sigh, and Purpled is grinning. Arms crossed, looking bored. “C’mon, it’s been a long time since we’ve sparred.”

“It has,” Purpled glances out the door, “It might look a bit weird if someone walks in. We’re both way above the skill level we’re supposed to be at.”

Tommy shrugs, “Come on, Purps. It’s been so long.”

“Now?” Purpled asks, gesturing around them. “We could literally go and spar tonight.”

“Where’s your sense of adventure?” Tommy announces, grinning. He jumps up and down shaking out his hands.

“Toms, I’m not doing this.”

“C’mon,” Tommy jumps a little bit more. “It would be fun—”

Tommy lunges forwards, and Purpled grabs his arm. Twisting it behind his back. Tommy turns out, before swinging an arm at Purpled’s face. He ducks it easily, darting behind

Tommy before tapping the top of his head.

Tommy spins around. “Really, dude?”

“I taught you better than this.”

“You’re not the only one who taught me, asshole,” Tommy mutters.

Purpled kicks out his leg, Tommy grabs it, before yanking backwards and Purpled’s back hits the ground.

“Fuck,” Purpled hissed.

Tommy takes a couple steps back and Purpled gets back onto his feet.

From seemingly nowhere Purpled pulls out a dagger.

“Oh?”

Purpled grabs another one from... his boot maybe? Before throwing it at the ground in front of Tommy’s feet.

Tommy grabs it out of the ground, before straightening up.

“Exhibition rules,” Purpled says. “Nicks are allowed, any actual damage and I’ll be so mad.”

Tommy nods, looking at the knife and then at Purpled.

Okay, Purpled is easily better with knives and Tommy has had basically not practice with knives apart from sparring with Purpled. Purpled is probably going to win this fight, unless Tommy can come up with something creative.

Purpled swipes first, and Tommy throws his head back.

He goes again, and Tommy ducks out of the way. Purpled sticks out his foot and Tommy almost trips on it, but he manages to gain his balance again.

“Just... lemme stab you,” Purpled mutters.

“Nah,” Tommy throws himself backwards, landing on his back before rolling over his shoulder and landing back on his feet. “I don’t really fancy that—”

“*Fancy.*” Purpled mocks in the worst British accent he’s ever heard. They both know Purpled can use accents almost flawlessly. Yet here he is, making fun of Tommy’s poor hybrid accent. “*I don’t really farhn-cee that.*”

“*Fan-cee.*” Tommy mocks back, ducking away from a swing of the knife. “I’m American, and I say fucking fan-cee.”

“I’m not American! I was born here.”

“Explain the accent.”

“Explain the British one.”

“My parents were British, and I watched a lot of British TV shows—”

Purpled pulls a face, advancing forwards as Tommy darts and dodges and ducks out of the way of the knife. At one point stopping Purpled's moving arm with his own.

"You had a TV?"

"Yeah."

"Weren't you super broke?"

"Not early days," Tommy explains, "I think. I dunno, they were nice I think."

"But you don't *know* that."

"Nope," Tommy grabs Purpled's arm, but Purpled shakes it free. "Not at all. They didn't neglect me though."

"Isn't that the problem?" Purpled lunges this time, which is great apart from the fact that it leaves his balance all funny.

Tommy grabs his arm, yanking him forwards slightly. Before moving one of his legs behind Purpled's and sitting down.

They're both on the floor, Purpled manages to scramble so that he has the dagger at Tommy's throat first. Tommy grabs Purpled's arm, pushing the dagger away from it. It embeds into the floor next to Tommy.

Tommy grabs the back of Purpled's hoodie before hauling him off.

Purpled hits the mat next to him, and they both lay there for a moment.

“Why are you good at fighting now?”

“I’ve always been good at fighting, asshole.”

“You have simply not,” Purpled swings again, and Tommy throws his arm up. Their arms meet, and Purpled makes a noise out of frustration. Before trying to punch Tommy again. He does not succeed.

Tommy sighs, before summoning a burst of power.

Purpled’s legs buckle underneath him. Tommy uses his dagger to nick the skin on Purpled’s hand.

“I hate you,” Purpled mutters.

“Never said I couldn’t.”

“I thought you had more self-preservation.”

“Wait until you hear about the gala—”

“The what?” Purpled asks, looking over at Tommy. Concern playing on his face. “What did you do at the gala?”

“Nothing!” Tommy lies.

“Tommy.”

“Don’t get mad at me?”

Purpled sits up, and Tommy does the same. Tommy looks down at his feet, his laces are rather interesting. Perhaps he should get new laces for them. That seems like a great idea actually.

Tommy shuffles slightly.

“So, someone was gonna shoot Fundy. Then I... kinda told them to shoot me, and like made it so the gun was resting against my chest.” He mutters, careful to make sure that Henry can’t hear him. “It went well though.”

Purpled stares at him for a long moment. “The fuck?” He yells, “Tommy!”

“It’s fine, it’s fine! I’m fine!”

“Why the fuck—”

“Tubbo said to! When I was like... fourteen, but still!”

“Fourteen?” Purpled yells back. “In what world would Tubbo *today* think that is a good idea?”

“He knows what he’s doing!”

“No he fucking doesn’t!” Purpled yells back, “None of us know what we’re doing Tommy! Tubbo is not an exception. So many things can go wrong, you’re not immortal—”

Tommy spins around, looking at Purpled with a glare. “I know that! I don’t care!”

“Well I care!” Purpled yells.

They both stop, and stare at each other for a moment. Both are breathing heavily, both from the sparring and the shouting match.

Tommy’s brain reboots then shuts down again, for the life of him he can not think of anything to say. He opens his mouth and then closes it again.

Purpled is silent, and glaring.

He glares with a bit more fury, before shaking his head. “You can’t always play the hero, Tommy.”

“I’m not trying to.”

“Aren’t you?” Purpled shoots back, “You’re being more and more reckless, anyone can see it. You’re— you’re scaring me.”

Tommy pauses, looking at Purpled.

Purpled doesn’t get scared. Not easily, it’s one of those facts about him. Like the fact he likes pineapple on pizza, and like the fact that he’s annoyingly good at chess for no apparent reason.

“Oh.” Tommy mutters.

“Look—” Purpled takes a deep breath. “I don’t know what happened at the warehouse—”

Tommy stiffens.

“But I know you’re not the same, and I know you need to talk to someone about it. It’s... done something to you, and I don’t think it’s something we can fix.”

“You’re being dangerously sappy.”

“I care about you,” Purpled says. He sounds a bit pained saying it, like even thinking about it is a mistake, but that’s okay. It’s so... Purpled that it makes it just a bit realer. “Okay? And I kinda want you around for a while. If you die being reckless— I’ll find a way to bring you back to life.”

“Can’t bring people back to life.”

“Can too,” Purpled says, “I’ll find a way to do it. Just to prove you wrong. Okay, Tommy? Don’t think I won’t, I’ll have Tubbo working with me. Think we’re bad now? Wait until we actually start agreeing on things—”

“Wait what—”

Purpled sighs, running a hand down his face. Before shaking his head a little bit more.
“You’re a handful.”

“Oh.”

“I don’t mind,” Purpled says.

And oh... that really says all he needs to know.

Okay now would be a really awkward time to cry—

So obviously tears spring from Tommy's eyes and start falling. He really can't have one fucking thing go his way, can he?

He also needs to stop fucking crying. Why is he crying all the time now? He's not a fan. As a human... he should cry considerably less. What if one day he's on patrol and he starts crying? Then what?

Well... probably not a lot. But still.

Tommy wipes at his eyes, trying to stop tears from falling.

Purpled looks more than out of his depth, but he still walks forwards. And somewhat awkwardly wraps an arm around Tommy's shoulders.

"I'm not even sad right now," Tommy wipes his eyes. "I've been crying so much."

"It's been stressful," Purpled says.

"Yeah. Yeah, it has."

Chapter End Notes



see you in a couple of days!

Chapter Summary:

Tommy wakes up. Eventually Tommy leaves with Purpled and they go home. Techno does not hand over the USB, which leads to chaos when they realise the USB has important stuff on it and no one knows where it is. Boring meetings. Wilbur looks like shit, he's not coping well.

Tommy girlbosses Phil too hard, he gets invited to what is essentially a training thing. They do that. Tommy is like "phil's balance is shit." and he's so correct for that. Then he wins in a fight against Phil. Purpled & Tommy spar, emotions happen.

What has happened since last chapter (in the discord):

- So. I got my own fic recced in my fic discord. They didn't recognise me as the author and we proceeded to talk about the fic. With me... you know, being the author. I said I've never read it. Then I roleplayed with my adopted child about how much we hate TINAAOS. (Sorry for tricking you Sam, I lowkey kinda feel bad.)
- Also that one bookmarker, I hope you're doing okay. Good song choice tho, it's on the unofficial TINAAOS playlist I use while writing.
- OH YEAH, I discovered that Awesamdude was spelt wrong in the summary, and *NO ONE* pointed it out. Now I have a local grammarly impersonator (Nebula) who

reads through my chapters (or re-reads previous ones!) and goes “wow you need a beta.” And I go “no <3” But thank you Nebula! <3333

- I discovered HOW unstable the TINAAOS readers are, like guys. Are you okay???? I know you’re not but I am very worried for you all and are there if you need me
- I could not figure out the percentage of heroes had good relationships with their parents. It’s 2/33, and I got the right answer but I thought it was wrong. It was not wrong. The discord will now relentlessly make fun of me, IT WAS SO PURPLED COULD HAVE A FUNNY BUT IT WAS TURNED ON ME

Also I have been researching prosthetic limbs for a long time trying to get them right. (How Techno puts it on, etc, different types, types of amputations.) And the most comprehensive video I found about how to put it on is [this one](#)! I don’t have a prosthetic limb, or know anyone with a prosthetic limb so all my research has been from websites and YouTube videos. Please correct me if I’m wrong about anything.

Side note, the translations of Tubbo's French.
AGAIN THANK YOU NEB AND PISTOL!!! <333

Ferme la bouche

Shut your mouth (shut up) but it’s ruder

Putain! Va te faire encoder, tu sale cafard. Te bite. T'as un tête de nœud. Ta guille
Fuck! Go fuck yourself you dirty cockroach. You dick. Pinhead. Shut the fuck up.

T'as un tête de nœud

Pinhead

Va te Faire foutre

Go get fucked

Te bite

You dick

Deck The Halls (The Holiday Special)

Chapter Summary

SOMEBODIES HALLS ARE GETTING DECKED.

THIS TIME IT'S SCHLATT, THE TOWER, AND IN GENERAL

HAPPY HOLIDAYS YOU FUCKS, HAVE SOME (mostly) FLUFF

ALSO YES THE NAME BLANKED OUT IN THE DISCORD WAS SCHLATT THE ENTIRE TIME YOU FUCKERS /lh

Chapter Notes

Warnings:

uhh... someone threatens murder, and means it at the end.

If you can't read this chapter due to religious or any other reasons, there's a chapter summary at the end. However, I would recommend reading from:

It's from Tubbo. That's odd because Tubbo is... Tubbo doesn't often call him while he's at work. He doesn't normally call Tommy at all, they text all the time.

I dedicate this chapter to... y'all. You fucks /pos
Thank you for everything

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy isn't really sure how the topic of Christmas came up. None of them are religious, and Christmas as a holiday that everyone celebrates is inherently a euro-centric idea. Based in a bunch of things Tommy wants no part in—

It's also the middle of the fucking year, and it's rather warm. It's the middle of fucking summer. (He supposes.) It's not even cold, in fact it's too hot.

L'Manberg typically has snowy Christmases, or at least they're very, very cold.

So why does Christmas come up? Tommy has no clue.

He's sitting on the couch, legs thrown out in front of him and dying from the heat. He's being a little bit dramatic, for sure. But Tommy thinks he's earned some dramatics. So that's what he does as he pants.

Techno just looks at him. "It's not even that warm."

"You're a piglin, fuck off," Tommy waves his hand. "You're gonna feel it in the winter, calling it now."

"I am too powerful for that," Techno says, like a liar. "Please, winter in L'Manberg isn't even that cold. Isn't it Wilbur?"

"It's fucking freezing," Wilbur says, he's sitting at the kitchen counter lazily. Not doing anything, and thankfully not eating fried rice with his hands. "And I had a Christmas in Russia once."

"Why were you in Russia?" Techno asks.

"Dunno, Phil and I went travelling when I was like... twelve."

"Did you?" Techno asks, "Why do I not know about this?"

"I thought you did," Wilbur says, "Those photos of Phil and I in France? We went to England to see if I had any connections, or if the government had anything on me."

“Oh.” Techno blinks a few times, “That makes sense.”

“Christmas in Russia was fun,” Wilbur grins. “Making snowmen, and then going in front of the fire. It really was nice, some of the most fun I’ve had at Christmas.”

“Yeah,” Techno says, “My first Christmas... I was maybe four. First one I remember anyway — and I... got a wooden sword and—” his face screws up like he’s thinking hard. “A red jacket and pink gumboots.”

“What a fashion icon,” Wilbur deadpans, he looks at Tommy. “What about you? What’s your favourite Christmas? Or holidays, or whatever you celebrate.”

“Uh.” Tommy fumbles for his words. “I’ve never really done anything for Christmas. Ranboo and I had work last year, and Tubbo had some stuff he needed to do. The year before that we went to... a burger place and had some actually good burgers.”

“That’s—” Techno starts.

“WHAT?” Wilbur yells, “Tommy! You’ve never had a proper Christmas? No trees, or presents? What sort of childhood did you have?”

“A traumatic one.”

“Tommy, Tommy, Tommy,” Wilbur sighs, shaking his head. “We are having a... *Swinter*.”

“No.”

“Christmas in the middle of the year, let’s go! Like the Australians,” Wilbur claps his hands together. “Oh boy, am I excited.”

"Australians still have Christmas in December, it's just warm—"

"This is so dumb," Tommy sighs.

Now. In Tommy's defence, he did not think Wilbur would actually follow through with any of those promises.

He just thought it was another conversation they had, that nothing would come of it.

Instead he walks into work the next day, and there's a tree.

There's a fucking tree in the middle of the room. Why the fuck is there a tree in the middle of the room?

Tommy stares at the tree.

"Wilbur!" Tommy yells, "The fuck is a tree doing in the living area?"

"Not much," Techno deadpans.

"How did you even get it up here?" Tommy asks, "You would have had to go up the stairwell."

"I had to go up the stairwell," Techno deadpans, "Because Wilbur's fucking scrawny arms could not take it."

"I am not scrawny!" Wilbur yells from another room, "Phil! Techno's callin' me scrawny!"

“Then don’t be scrawny!” Phil calls back from another part of the floor. “Techno, stop bullying Wilbur.”

Ah. Family.

Techno mutters something under his breath, and at that moment Wilbur emerges from another room carrying a box of something. He wobbles under the apparent weight of it all, almost falling over.

He drops the box onto the floor with some clattering and Tommy winces.

“Huh?” Tommy says.

“Tree time!” Wilbur says, with a tone that means there’s little room for argument. “It’s tree time, and anything you say is not valid.”

Techno sighs, “Are you going to micromanage again?”

“I did that *once*. ” Wilbur snaps, he shakes his head slightly, before rolling his eyes. “And Phil said it was a trauma response, so there.”

“I’m about to give you a fucking trauma response,” Techno mutters.

Wilbur gasps, and stumbles back. He sniffs.

Dramatic bitch.

“Techie—”

“Absolutely not.”

“Techie!” Wilbur yells, he fake sobs which sounds slightly too real for Tommy’s comfort.
“You can’t just do this to me! After all we’ve been through.”

“You don’t remember half of it,” Techno deadpans, he doesn’t even look up from his phone.

Is Techno... girlbossing?

Wilbur gasps again. Before standing up straight like nothing has happened. “Okay,” Wilbur says, “Help me with the tree.”

“What?”

“Help me,” Wilbur says, “With the tree.”

Tommy looks at the tree. It looks pretty good, one of those cheap plastic looking things, but that’s okay. Surely an alive one would drop needles everywhere? Tommy looks at Wilbur, then at Techno.

“What’s... wrong with the tree?”

Wilbur looks at him, “There’s nothing on it.”

“The needles?”

Wilbur's mouth falls open. "Holy fuck you've never had a good Swinter—"

"Swinter is a made up concept, you haven't either—"

"You decorate the trees, dingus. You make the tree all pretty, put tinsel and lights and baubles or—"

Techno sighs, "The way Western society celebrates Christmas supports capitalistic ideas that presents are something special, along with time with family—"

Wilbur groans, "Shut, shut, shut. You're no fun. I wanna see a sparkly tree—"

"It has origins in one of the most oppressive religions in the world and supports—"

"Shut, shut, shut," Wilbur whispers. "I just wanna... y'know, Christmas! Tech, please... I don't remember the last Christmas where we did the Christmassy things. You were in the hospital last Christmas!"

"I almost died?"

"Your point?"

Wilbur groans, "Tech—"

Techno groans and stands up, putting his book to the side and walking over to the box where he grabs the tangle of lights. Tommy... thought this was only in movies, but no apparently it's real life.

He sighs, watching Techno look at him, “Dude,” Techno whispers, “C’mon Help me untangle these lights, it’s a nightmare.”

“It’s June.” Tommy deadpans.

Techno sighs, throwing the lights at Tommy who catches them. Tommy starts untangling them wordlessly, he glares at Wilbur and Wilbur just grins. He looks... disgustingly happy and Tommy is pretty weak to that.

He untangles the lights with less of a scowl.

It’s quite a task, he discovers. He sits on the ground and works on it... for what feels like forever, scowling slightly at the lights as slowly and bit by bit he starts untangling it. It’s nice almost... it’s something to do that requires some thought but not that much thought.

Eventually Techno and Wilbur start trying to help, but Tommy scowls until they leave.

It takes... a second and Tommy eventually places it on the ground smiling up at Wilbur. “Done!”

“Holy shit,” Wilbur whispers, “Normally we give up and get new ones.”

Tommy shrugs, “Wrap it around a tube. That’ll keep it from tangling...”

Wilbur gasps, “Tommy! You are a genius!”

“I am somethin’,” Tommy mutters and shakes his head slightly, before picking up the lights slightly and spinning them around in his hand. “So now we... around the tree?”

“Yeah!” Wilbur grins, “So, normally Tech holds it. Like above the tree, then you run around and do the lights and... I’ll fix them.”

“Oh,” Tommy adds, blinking a few times. Not quite sure what to think about the entire situation, instead he shrugs his shoulders. “I can do that. If you want of course... I don’t really mind.”

“Okay,” Techno deadpans with an eye roll, “Do it then.”

So Tommy does, it’s a pretty simple process, he just... walks around the tree holding the lights. Wilbur makes sure that it doesn’t snag on too many branches and that it’s not too tight against the tree. Which again, feels fair enough. Not at all rude, just... like one of those things that people do.

It’s not like Wilbur is being condescending and essentially insulting Tommy. Nah, it’s not like that, Wilbur’s just doing something nice.

Tommy keeps walking around the tree. Making sure it looks pretty even, it must be something because Wilbur goes around to correct it, which again, fair enough.

Eventually he’s done, and he takes a step back.

The lights aren’t on, and the lights are green anyway. So they barely stand out against the tree. It’s gratifying though, to just know that the lights are on there and he did that. He looks at Techno and gives a small smile.

Techno gives one back, “Looks good.”

Wilbur makes a noise around the other side. “Where’s the fuckin’ powerpoint?” He struggles for a moment longer before the tree brightens up and there’s... light everywhere. It’s beautiful.

The lights are mostly white, but there are some red lights thrown in there too.

It looks nice, it looks really nice.

Wilbur grins from around the other side of the tree and grins even wider. Tommy's honestly shocked that his face doesn't snap in half from the utter and sheer amount of joy that is displayed against his face at the moment.

"And that," Wilbur says, "Is only the start. We gotta do tinsel!"

"Tinsel?" Tommy asks slowly, "Like the stuff in movies?"

Wilbur opens his mouth, and then closes it again. He just blinks at Tommy and Tommy gives a slightly awkward smile.

Okay it's hard to explain his childhood was a bit... busy, y'know with things like trying not to die or have his powers explode so badly that they burnt him. He shrugs a shoulder, and Wilbur shakes his head. But it seems fond.

"Not acceptable," Wilbur laughs, grabbing tinsel from out of the box. It looks... scratchy, he throws it across the room at Tommy and Tommy catches it.

It's sparkly and slightly scratchy, but still. He wraps it around his neck nonetheless and grins. It rustles as he moves, but he does it anyway.

Wilbur grins, and apparently does the same. Grabbing his own bit of tinsel and wrapping it around his neck and shoulders. He then passes another bit to Techno and Techno begrudgingly does the same.

“Swinter songs!” Wilbur grins, grabbing his phone frantically, “Do not worry. I have a playlist.”

Techno sighs, but it seems very fond and soft. More like a ‘we know’ way than a ‘you idiot, you have a playlist’ way.

Wilbur looks... perhaps the happiest that Tommy has ever seen him. With bright eyes and a bright smile on his face. “Okay, so Michael Buble, a classic. But we have many other classics too, it’s difficult to determine who we use.”

“The metal version?” Techno suggests, “Please. Or ‘Rock Around The Christmas Tree’? Please I want a rock version of ‘All I Want For Christmas’.”

“Don’t we all,” Wilbur grins. He clicks his phone.

It starts with some bells, before a heavy guitar that Tommy loves more than anything.

He knows this song, he’s worked in customer service long enough to know that this song haunts not only his dreams, but his nightmares and seems to echo around his ears every holiday season. He doesn’t like that song... but—

Techno starts head banging, and making a bit of a fool out of himself, all while grinning and Wilbur joins in. Techno’s on the fake electric guitars and Wilbur’s on the fake electric drums, which he does a great job at.

Tommy stands there for a bit, doing the generic white person dance of wiggling his shoulders a bit. It’s very funny to watch them, and Tommy almost gets his phone out to record something. But this... it feels like a them moment.

A moment that isn’t supposed to be shared, and Tommy’s okay with that.

“Tommy!” Wilbur yells over the music, “Join in! Come on, air guitar solo!”

"I can't play the air guitar!" Tommy yells back.

“Nonsense!” Wilbur yells back even louder, and continues his drumming quest.

Tommy sighs, shaking his head slightly, before getting his air guitar out of the air case and sighing. He glares both at Wilbur and Techno, because that makes him feel slightly better about the entire thing.

He puts the air guitar away.

Instead he plays the air drum, because he can't play guitar but he can keep some sort of beat. He bops his head back and forth as he slams the air drumsticks into the air drum kit. It's fun, he's head bopping, hair getting in his face and his mouth. (Not comfortable. But hey, what can ya do?)

Tommy grins, as the song comes to a close, slightly tired and out of breath.

He shakes his head, with nothing but fondness before leaning against Techno. Wilbur's laughing, Techno's laughing and Tommy feels the lightest he has in a while.

“That was cool!” Tommy laughs, almost falling onto his face but Techno makes sure that he doesn't fall onto his face. “Looks like I can play the air drums.”

“Air guitar just isn't your thing,” Wilbur sighs sympathetically, “Air drums are cooler anyway. Everyone loves the drummer of a band... the guitarist however.”

“Hey!”

Tommy laughs again, before unwrapping the tinsel from around his neck. It's scratching into his skin slightly and not really something that Tommy fancies at the moment. It feels... not sore against his neck, but uncomfortable.

And slightly too uncomfortable for his liking.

He passes it back to Wilbur and Wilbur also takes his off.

"Okay," Wilbur says. A more calming song comes on, one that in complete fairness, Tommy doesn't actually know. "So it's like the lights, apart from that we go in the gaps of the lights. However... Tech and I used to play a game... where I'd like throw the tinsel at the tree and he had to make it into a shape."

Tommy makes a small noise, before nodding his head in a way that he'd almost call desperate.

"Can we, can we, can we? It seems like so much fun. Wil, Wilbur, please. Please. Can we?"

Wilbur laughs, he throws a bit of tinsel at the tree and Techno screws up his nose at it.

"What the fuck am I supposed to do with that?" Techno asks, still he walks forwards and squints at the tinsel. He moves one end slightly, before looking at Wilbur with a slight bow and a huge grin on his face. "That... that is an anteater."

Wilbur's face drops.

"OH YOU ASSHOLE!" Wilbur screams, and jumps at Techno.

Techno is laughing so hard, that he falls over and seemingly in response to that. Wilbur scowls the entire time and apparently hates it because he glares at Techno. Techno sees this again, before laughing so hard that he almost falls over again.

It's... family.

The elevator opens, and Phil stands there. He squints at Wilbur and Techno, before looking at the tree before sighing and looking at Wilbur.

“Look, even for you— June is a bit early to be setting up the tree.”

“No, no, no,” Wilbur says holding up a winger and waggling it slightly. “You do not understand—”

“You are correct. I do not.”

“So,” Wilbur explains and grins a bit wider. “Tommy has never had a proper Christmas. So we are having a Swinter. And we’re gonna force Tommy to have a real holiday experience. With ice skating—”

“Huh?”

“And hot chocolate and presents and... okay snow might be a bit hard to achieve, but I think I’ll find a way.” Wilbur hums before shrugging. “Okay truthfully I got no clue, but I thought a Swinter party would be cool.”

“Party?” Tommy whispers.

“Company party,” Techno explains, leaning closer to Tommy. “We have a holiday party every year. Sometimes we have one for the founding of the tower. So it would be the heroes and their interns and stuff. Yeah?”

“Yeah...” Tommy mutters. “Can I invite my people there?”

“Yup,” Techno says, “Normally family and stuff goes. It’s a huge event, happens over like two floors of the tower. It’s a lot of fun. I reckon this one will be smaller... but yeah, I reckon you could bring Tubbo and Ranboo.”

Tommy can feel Phil’s and Wilbur’s eyes on him, but he instead does a big brain tactic called... ignoring them. It’s a ground breaker. Never been done before, and Tommy loves that for himself. It really... really is almost funny.

“Won’t get approval,” Phil says easily, “They’ve tightened up their procedures... it’s a bit of a scam. People gotta pass security checks, but like... super intense ones to get a job here now. They won’t just let people into the tower.”

“Oh.” Wilbur says, “Well there goes that idea.”

Phil looks slightly apologetic. “Sorry mate, with the attacks and stuff—”

“I know,” Wilbur sighs, he pinches the bridge of his nose. "Before looking at the tree and screwing up his nose again. “Rightio... I’m just gonna, tree time. Phil can ya help me? I don’t trust these heathens to do it.”

Phil snorts, and walks over, taking the other end of the tinsel.

“Wow. This seems pretty classist.” Tommy deadpans.

Wilbur looks at him, eyes wide and mouth open.

“I mean... the two people from Logstedchire... you heathens.”

Techno low whistles, shoving his hands into his pockets. “Jeez... Tommy, you might have to Tweet about that—”

“No, no, no, no!” Wilbur says, hands up almost in surrender. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry! Forgive me, you can do the tinsel if you want to.”

Techno scoffs, “Absolutely not—”

“No fucking way,” Tommy adds.

Wilbur glares, throwing his hands up in the air and almost screaming. Tommy can see it on his face. “I hate you all! I hate this house, it’s a fucking prison.”

“You have your own house?” Techno says slowly.

“A prison!” Wilbur yells again.

“Shut up and decorate your beloved tree,” Phil says.

Wilbur obliges.

Phil and Wilbur put on the tinsel, it’s much neater than the lights and they appear to have this down to a science. It’s weird to see how well they work together, Tommy knows them as Wilbur and Phil, the chaotic father and son duo.

But hey... there must be a reason Phil trained Wilbur for so long.

It shows.

Techno sighs, "I am bored."

"I do not care. Technoblade." Wilbur spits back.

Techno fake sniffs. "Betrayed... by my own flesh and blood."

"Not the first time," Phil chimes in. "There was that time with the bacon... or the toddler incident of 2018."

Wilbur shudders, "No. Shut it. Don't even."

Phil nods, a solemn look on his face. "I apologise for my past actions."

Techno laughs, a barking laugh and he almost falls over with the force he throws his head back with. It's... hilarious is the short word for it. He staggers backwards and trips over a book. This starts... a chain reaction.

Techno reaches out to grab Tommy, accidentally dragging Tommy to the ground.

Tommy kicks his foot into the side of the tree.

The tree topples dangerously to the side.

Wilbur tries to save it with a screech and reaches for the tree.

This pushes it the other way.

Where Phil is.

And the tree falls slightly to the left of Phil.

They all stare at the tree for a long moment, on the ground almost in pieces.

Tommy takes a deep breath, before facepalming.

Wilbur sighs and looks up at the roof. "Can't have shit in L'Manberg. Can we?"

"No," Tommy sighs, looking at the lights he untangled with such effort and care on the ground, unplugged and half falling off. "It appears we can't."

"Maybe... let's not have a tree," Phil says and Wilbur makes a sad noise. "I know, I know. It's just that it gets busy in June... we can still decorate like it's the holidays."

"We could stick up a huge picture of a tree against the wall..." Techno glances at the wall. "That's very funny. And we can still put presents at the bottom."

Wilbur grins.

Oh. Oh no.

So... truthfully after the mess that the tree was, he'd think Wilbur would gain the sense to simply... not keep trying this whole Swinter thing. In complete and utter truth, Tommy had no care about the holidays.

The only importance the holidays used to have was that... Tommy got paid extra for working.

While it may be nice, it didn't seem worth the big deal and effort.

Wilbur disagrees.

Tommy figures this out pretty quickly, when there is a huge ass tree stuck up on the wall.

It's literally just a slightly blurry picture of tree, which is decorated very well. Still slightly blurry and very cartoonish. It's almost funny how it looks. Sitting against the wall, underneath the 'tree' are two wrapped presents, they're both in green wrapping paper, but it's a nice shade of green at that.

With a sigh, Tommy looks around for Wilbur. To see the fucker grinning.

Wilbur isn't there.

Phil is, though, sitting at the kitchen counter with a heap of paperwork spread out across the bench. He sighs and clicks his pen absent-mindedly.

Tommy sets his bag down on the couch and avoids looking out the window. Instead he walks up to the kitchen counter, making sure his footsteps are loud enough that it doesn't scare Phil.

"Hey, Phil," Tommy says.

Phil jumps slightly and spins around. "Oh. Tommy. Hi."

“Hello!” Tommy sits on the stool next to Phil, and looking at all the paperwork... it looks like a bunch of patrol reports. Things that heroes do begrudgingly, and are supposed to keep everyone updated.

It’s pretty much a joke.

Phil sighs, moving one into a different pile.

“What are ya lookin’ for?”

“Any mentions of obsidian irises...” Phil murmurs, “In the reports, in the newspapers, anything really.” He slides a tablet over to Tommy, and Tommy picks it up, before looking at it.

“Where’s Wil?”

“Uh— Fundy,” Phil says, his smile a bit tighter. He shakes it off and looks back at his papers. “Do you like the decorations? Wilbur’s been obsessing over them.”

“Really?” Tommy deadpans and Phil snorts at that. “He seems to actually care about this, doesn’t he?”

“Yeah...” Phil trails off, “I can talk to him if you want—”

“No, no, no,” Tommy shakes his head, “It’s— cool. I... don’t mind, y’know...”

Phil raises an eyebrow. “So... what would you want for—” Phil screws up his nose. “Swinter. Because Techno and Wilbur are trying to be all sneaky about it, and while I love them, they are as subtle as a kick in the face.”

“A kick off a roof,” Tommy adds absent-mindedly.

“That too, I suppose.”

Tommy hums, “Theseus merch—”

“No way.”

“A Theseus meet up—”

“Do you wanna kill me before retirement?”

Tommy shrugs, “Uh... dunno. Maybe a laptop— wait no, don’t do that—”

Phil gives him a look. “If you care that much, I can make it a tax write off. But I don’t mind getting you a good laptop.”

“I... don’t know what to get you guys.”

Phil pauses and shrugs his shoulders, “I’m not sure. Tech— he’s hard to buy for. He tends to like smaller sentimental things. Maybe something gold—”

“That seems like a stereotype,” Tommy deadpans.

“Yesterday I watched Techno look at a golden chain like it would kill him if he didn’t look at it. I think gold would work.”

“I could get him... a pig keychain,” Tommy says slowly. “Oh he’d hate that.”

Phil grins, “He would.”

“Well it’s decided then.” Tommy grins, “Oh they’re gonna hate me.”

Phil just smiles, “I don’t think they will.”

“Don’t be all sappy with me old man, I’m gonna make them hate me.”

Phil laughs, “Yeah, yeah, okay, you do that Toms.”

Tommy grins. “I can think of a couple ways.”

“Sure ya can.”

He could make SBI hate him!

Most of the ways of making them hate him involves him telling Wilbur that he’s Theseus. That would make for a rather interesting Swinter lunch.

Tommy sighs and turns around, trudging up to his office.

Now. He thinks that with the whole Fundy-being-injured thing, Wilbur would... you know. Give it up, very little is worth this much effort.

Still Tommy sighs when he sees a couple presents underneath the tree. He walks over and glances at them.

There are three presents under there. One from Phil, and two from Wilbur.

Techno is standing there. Looking amused about the entire thing. He grins, before turning around to look at Tommy, amusement in his eyes.

“So, happy Swinter.”

“I hate that word,” Tommy mutters. “I haven't even gotten you guys anything yet.”

“You don't need to get anything,” Techno says, “We're doing this for you after all. I couldn't care less.”

“What do you want?”

Techno shrugs.

Tommy sighs, “Floof would be more helpful than you— where's my favourite doggo?”

“At home,” Techno sighs, “Niki has today off. She's looking after Floof, things are a bit crazy.”

“Yet here we are... having a Swinter.”

“It's a good distraction,” Techno says and Tommy feels like he means every part of that. “For Wil and Phil— they're both a bit stressed. And, it's nice, to come up here and it's all decorated.”

“Yeah...” Tommy says slowly, “I suppose.”

“Are you okay?” Techno asks, “The Fundy thing was intense— if you need to talk to someone. A professional about it, that’s fair enough.”

Tommy just looks at him, “I’ve seen worse.”

“Now, that’s where the problem lies,” Techno sighs, crouching down so he’s next to Tommy. “Tommy. Therapy is very good—”

“No.”

“You sound like Wilbur.”

“That’s an insult.”

“It’s supposed to be.”

Tommy scowls, and crosses his arm. “Look. I got it dude, don’t worry about me.”

Techno sighs, “I’m going to. I care about you.”

“I didn’t ask you to,” Tommy mumbles, arms crossed.

Techno just looks at him, there’s a weight behind his gaze that Tommy doesn’t quite know how to interpret. He might never know how to interpret it, and... Tommy isn’t sure how he feels about that.

He nods slowly, and Techno stands up. “I know you didn’t ask me to care, but I’m going to anyway.”

Tommy looks down at the floor.

“You deserve to be happy, Tommy,” Techno says. “I care about you. And there’s very little you can do to change that—”

“If Phil and Wilbur found out—” Tommy blurts out, before he can stop himself. He glances at Techno, then back at the floor. “I think that would change.”

“It wouldn’t change,” Techno says, looking at the huge paper tree on the wall. “Not really.”

“Ha, okay,” Tommy snorts, “Yes. Give up your family for a kid who has only made your life worse.”

Techno looks at Tommy. That heavy look in his eyes again. “Now, the thing with that statement. Is that it implies you aren’t family.”

They’re both quiet.

“Happy Swinter.”

Tommy stares.

Oh.

Oh, okay.

“Happy Swinter...” Tommy mutters back.

Techno turns around, walking off to the elevator.

The elevator closes and Tommy’s left standing there.

“Well shit,” Tommy mutters to himself. “That’s not good.”

And... some part of him, deep, deep down. Ignores the ache that comes with those words. The ache that hurts sometimes when he’s around Tubbo, Ranboo and Purpled, the ache that hurt him before and... look at how that turned out.

Tommy sighs.

So he ignores it.

He simply ignores all of those emotions because he’s stupid.

Instead he works on buying presents for everyone.

They can’t be too expensive, he still feels guilty about spending his money. So instead he looks for the perfect stuff at a little store in Logstedchire. After work one day, he goes there, walking in there nervously.

Tommy looks around, it has plenty of little cool trinkets.

He pauses by a butcher's cleaver.

It's a terrible joke. With Techno being a piglin. But... something about him finds that hilarious for a reason he can't quite name, he grabs the cleaver and turns it over in his hands.

It's... very funny, but he can't bring himself to do it.

Instead Tommy puts it down and continues to look.

He finds a little crow figurine for Phil, it's not too big. And would look very good on a desk... Tommy grabs it, deciding that he'll actually pay for it. It seems a bit rude not to pay for it.

He finds three smaller crow figurines and grins as he picks them up. It's rather sweet.

Wilbur and Techno... they're difficult to buy for. They have a rich father. (Or father figure if you're Technoblade who refuses to name Phil as anything but a father figure which... yeah Tommy can relate to.)

He pauses.

There's a book.

Tommy grins.

Yeah... yeah he's totally getting that one. He picks it up and reads the blurb. This is *too* funny to miss over, in fact he can ignore that it's slightly outside his budget because. *Fuck* that's funny.

He ambles around a bit longer, trying to think of something for Techno. Techno is... difficult, he wants to take this seriously. He owes Techno that— Techno's actually been there. In a way that many people haven't been.

Tommy sighs slightly.

What do you get someone who likes stabbing? A knife?

"Fuck," Tommy says, mostly to himself. "Now what?" He asks the shelves like that'll give him any answers. He sighs again, because... it feels like a sighing situation. He pinches the bridge of his nose and... sighs again.

He goes to leave the store, when something catches his eye.

'The Art of War' by Sun Tzu. Tommy looks at the book, it's really... really pretty. With a golden dragon on the front, that's swirling around golden Chinese characters. Tommy stares at it.

It's so pretty.

Tommy picks it up. It's perfect.

He grins slightly.

Well... he shopped for everyone.

Excellent.

And that... that is a day.

Tommy slept well, for once. Which was amazing.

Again. In complete honesty, Tommy knew that Wilbur wouldn't drop this. But still it feels a bit realer walking into work with three wrapped presents in his backpack.

He walks into the foyer and...

There are decorations.

Tommy smiles to himself, before looking at Kristin. There are some points where Tommy knows that Wilbur couldn't reach and someone with wings had to have been called.

Tommy shows his pass to Kristin who nods, "Happy Swinter, Tommy."

"Don't even," Tommy mutters.

"I made cookies," Kristen says, sliding over a tupperware container filled with chocolate chip cookies. "Share them with your roommates... I heard you and Daniel moved in?"

"Yeah," Tommy nods, "He's staying."

Kristin nods. There's an expression on her face that Tommy can't quite read, so instead he runs a hand down his face.

"Tommy. What happened at the gala—"

"Nope," Tommy snaps. "I'm fine. Really. Well I'm not fine— but that isn't why."

Kristin just nods, she looks skeptical.

Tommy can't blame her.

Instead he picks up the container of cookies and nods, "Thank you Kristin."

"Always."

He turns to the elevator and steps in. Pressing the button and tucking the cookies underneath his arm.

Reaching floor 69 he stares.

Ah. Yeah they're really decorated. With red tinsel and just general tinsel. There's stuff hanging from the ceiling too.

Tommy smiles at it.

It's so fucking stupid, in complete honesty. It's a stupid concept and an even dumber execution of it. But... Wilbur did this for him.

He didn't have to.

There might be some self-serving on Wilbur's part. But still, he did it. Tommy smiles a bit brighter.

"Tommy."

Tommy turns around and looks at Phil, who looks slightly confused. He's holding an ice pack to his eye and generally looks confused.

"Philza Minecraft!" He salutes and Phil sighs softly. "How may I serve you?"

"By not saluting at me, I'm pretty sure that's offensive to military personnel."

Tommy shrugs, "What are they gonna do? Shoot me? One could only dream—"

"Huh?" Someone calls out, and Tommy knows in his very soul that's Dream. Especially when he pokes his head around the corner and squints at Tommy. "Yeah?"

"Not talking about you, self absorbed asshole." Tommy adds with a glare. "Get onto your own floor."

Dream groans. "Sap is going on strike."

"Huh?" Phil spins on his heel. "What does that even mean?"

"He's mad about the whole not being able to date thing," Dream shrugs. "So he's taken hostage of the Dream Team floor and they're listening to sad songs."

"R—right." Phil blinks a couple of times. "Good for him."

Dream shrugs, "And the higher-ups will have my head if they see me there. Y'know how they are Phil."

"I do."

"Yeah, so I went up here. Because I'm generally in less trouble when I'm with you lot."

Phil gives Dream a look, "Are you going to get into trouble for this?"

"Maybe. But— I think it's worth it," Dream adjusts his mask so that it's covering his whole face. "Freedom of speech and all that."

Phil gives Dream a slightly sad look, "Let me know if you need anything."

Dream huffs underneath his mask and crosses his arms. "Phil, it's fine. This won't be as bad as when George blew up a building—"

"You almost lost your job?"

Dream shrugs, "But I didn't—"

Phil makes a small chirping noise.

Tommy has to bury down the chirp that tried to happen. He lodges it in the back of his throat, clamping his mouth shut.

Nope. No fucking way.

First of all. He can chirp?

Second of all. He's shaking.

Oh shit, he's shaking.

He buries his hands into his pockets and tries not to shake. He refuses to chirp, because this is awful. Pushing down the urge, he shakes his head and turns around heading back towards his office.

“See ya Dream, see ya Phil! I have work to do.”

Phil snorts, and Dream waves a hand.

“See ya Phil!”

“Let me know if you need anything, Dream.”

“I’m *fine* Phil, seriously—”

Tommy walks into his office, closing the door and sighing. He sits at his desk and just leans his head against the desk for a moment. He thinks he’s earned some right to just sit there like a menace.

He puts the cookies on the table and sighs, before opening one of them and eating it. It’s slightly too dry, but Tommy doesn’t really care. He eats the cookie, being careful not to put crumbs everywhere.

Eventually, Tommy leans back in his chair and stares at the ceiling. Huh.

The door opens a moment later, and Tommy glares.

It's Techno, and he has Floof. Which is great, he sets Floof down on the ground who runs around in a circle and decides that the beanbag in the corner of Tommy's office is the perfect spot to sit.

Tommy can't blame Floof.

Techno stands like a peasant.

"How are you?" Techno asks, he picks up a cookie and bites it with no hesitation. He looks at the cookies, "These are dry."

"Kristin made them," Tommy murmurs, "They're alright."

Techno nods, before picking up Floof and sitting down on the beanbag. He grabs his phone and starts scrolling.

Tommy gives him a look, "What?"

"Hmm?" Techno says, "Oh. Wilbur's having a breakdown."

"*Huh?*" Tommy blinks at him, "Are you gonna... help?"

"Phil situation, I wouldn't be helpful," Techno takes another bite of the cookie and Floof looks vaguely offended as crumbs drop onto his fur. He looks at Tommy, the most deadpan a dog can look. "Anyway, you're easy to be around. And I can just say I'm busy."

Tommy sighs, "Wanna do a Twitter thing?"

"Sure."

Tommy nods, and grabs his phone.

[@arandomintern](#): since a certain vigilante-turned hero won't leave me alone. Ask questions and I'll try to get him to answer.

Techno sighs and runs a hand through his hair. "This will end badly."

"Probably."

Tommy waits a moment, before starting to scroll. "Do you, Phil and Wilbur still have meals together?"

"Yup," Techno sighs, "We haven't for a couple weeks because Phil's been really busy, I've been busy with you and Wilbur is busy with Fundy."

Tommy types out the response.

"What do you want for Swinter?" Techno asks.

"Some mental stability."

"I can get you therapy if you want..." Techno trails off, "What do you want though? Wilbur already took everything good, Phil already knows and I'm left here with no clue. Which seems offensive."

Tommy hums, scrolling through Twitter. "Who's your favourite person to work with on stealth missions?"

“Fundy,” Techno says with zero hesitation. “He’s the sneakiest. George is also good, but he doesn’t take his job overly seriously.”

“Twitter wants to know if Fundy’s okay.”

“I can’t tell them that.”

“Fair.”

Tommy types more on his phone.

“What do I get you though? Just tell me and I’ll get you it, as long as it’s not like... a house, I can’t afford to get you a house sorry. I mean I could try, I just dunno how well it would go for me.”

Tommy hums, trying to think about it. “I actually dunno, a laptop might be nice? I don’t really like reading. You could just buy me groceries.”

“I’d buy you groceries if you asked regardless, what do you want for Swinter?”

“I really dunno, headphones? A new backpack?”

Techno groans, picking up Floof, before sitting down in the beanbag. “Yeah but the other two were like meaningful gifts. Or Wil got you something practical, I could just buy you a backpack no matter when.”

Tommy groans, leaning back in his seat. “I really dunno Tech, I dunno Some way to contact you?”

“You mean a phone?”

“Well I currently don’t have my own phone, I’m using Ranboo’s,” Tommy deadpans, “And I don’t take my phone on patrol and stuff.”

“You want a tracker? Like an animal.” Techno deadpans.

“Well... don’t word it like that,” Tommy spins slightly in his chair, looking at Floof who is half falling asleep. “More like... I trust you to help me if anything goes wrong, Wilbur and Phil won’t be much help if I’m Theseus.”

Techno’s ear twitches.

“Yeah... so having a sure fire way to contact you if everything goes wrong. That would be cool.”

Techno nods, “Leave it with me.” He picks Floof up off the beanbag who doesn't stir. Before walking out the door.

What? Now... now Tommy is scared.

The day passes.

It’s that simple.

He doesn’t do a lot, surprisingly most people have managed to stay out of controversy.

Well... SBI at least, he can hear the Dream Team’s PR people screaming from two floors above.

Sucks to be them, Tommy supposes.

At least they get a team to help with the mess.

Tommy is the only one fixing SBI's messes.

The day passes and he goes home.

For once the train doesn't suck, and he gets home slightly earlier than usual.

Tubbo is at the laptop, chewing on the lid of a pen with maths homework either side of him.

Tommy closes the door quietly, but Tubbo notices because of course he does.

“Hey Boo, I dunno if I should take this one seriously— it's probably fine right?” Tubbo turns around, “Oh! Tommy. Hey.”

“Hi,” Tommy returns, he drops his backpack on the floor and walks to the kitchen. Going through the fridge for anything to eat, and begrudgingly settles on eating an entire carrot. Ranboo might kill him for that later, but it's worth it. “How was school?”

“Oh, yeah,” Tubbo says, “It was.”

The door slams open, and Ranboo stands there. Glaring. “Tommy what the fuck!” He yells.

Okay, Ranboo's swearing. That's not good.

Tommy looks at Ranboo with what he'd call complete fear, he takes a few steps back and Tubbo also looks slightly afraid. Ranboo walks over to Tommy, he grabs him by the shoulders before shaking him back and forth as Tommy lets this happen.

"You betrayed Theseus!" Ranboo yells.

Tommy stares, "I... am Theseus?"

"Oh shit," Tubbo says, "Okay. Tommy wild story. So... some people think you and Theseus are like a thing you know how it is."

"No?" Tommy says.

"Fanfiction," Tubbo deadpans, "There's fanfiction about you and Theseus, which... is kinda weird."

Tommy blinks at them, "People think I am dating... myself."

"Yup!" Tubbo says, "And there's this super famous one, Hot Sugar. And I haven't read the new chapter. Spoilers! Ranboo."

Tommy just stares at the wall for a long moment, curious about what the internet and the world has come to. Part of him knows that it's very funny. Because to be quite frank it is, it's very funny that he's being shipped with himself.

It really is funny, the more he thinks about it. Imagine if people knew the truth, then that would've been even funnier. Tommy stares at the wall for a moment longer and Ranboo throws himself onto the couch.

“You betrayed Theseus!” He yells, “How could you, Tommy?”

“Uh. I am very sorry?” Tommy says slowly. What else is he supposed to say apart from that?
“Just know I’d never betray Theseus?”

Ranboo fake sobs on the couch again, and Tommy looks at Tubbo who is looking at his phone with tears in his eyes.

“You’re kidding me, Tubbo?”

Tubbo looks a bit guilty, “In my defence, the characterisation of both of you is so off it feels like I’m just reading a random story about two people I don’t know. I started reading it as a meme, but... I don’t think it’s a meme anymore Tommy.

Tommy groans and hits himself in the forehead, “I hate everything.”

"THE AUTHOR JUST SAID THAT’S HOW IT ENDS!" Ranboo screams, “AND THAT THEY’RE GOING ON BREAK. Tubbo, Tubbo, this is terrible.”

“What?” Tubbo screeches, “No, no, you can’t just end it like that.”

Tommy just sighs. This... this was truthfully not something he thought about when he was living a double life. He’d never even thought about the fanfiction, or fanart... oh no. He stares at the ceiling a bit longer, willing himself to not commit some sort of crime.

He doesn’t, much to his disappointment.

It is a little bit funny, he can see the irony in this situation. Quite easily too. Instead of doing anything practical, he sits down on the couch next to Ranboo (who is having a tantrum). Tubbo sits in between the pair of them.

“This is terrible.” Ranboo says, “I am terribly upset by this.”

“I can tell,” Tommy deadpans, “At least you’re not having fanfiction written between you and yourself. It can always be worse. When I became a vigilante I did not think this would be what would happen. That I’d be in a fanfiction called...”

“Hot Sugar,” Ranboo adds absent-mindedly.

Tubbo grins, and leans over so he’s leaning against Tommy’s shoulder. Tommy sighs. “You know what would break the internet?”

“What?”

“If Theseus tweeted about Hot Sugar, the song.”

Tommy grins, looking at Tubbo. It is a perfect plan, mostly so he can watch everyone lose their minds.

[@theseusiguess](#): Maybe I’ll make ‘Hot Sugar’ my theme song, it’s pretty catchy.

And Tommy does whatever a responsible person would do, and turns off his phone. Then decides that this is going to be a problem for a later version of Tommy because this is a fucking hilarious thing that’s happened to him.

Ranboo clears his throat, “A dramatic reading. Of Hot Sugar, done by Ranboo,” He sighs dramatically, before taking another deep breath. *“Tommy felt hope, felt a brindled burning at the passionate hide, at the chance to finally see Theseus’s face, the man resting under the mask, the person he’d been wanting to see the face of this whole time.”* Ranboo starts.

Tommy screws up his face, “So I don’t even know what this Theseus dude looks like?”

“Nope!” Tubbo grins.

“So—”

“Shut up,” Tubbo says, looking at Ranboo and he’s completely invested. Tommy groans and slides down in his seat, shaking his head at how fucking stupid his friends are. “Ranboo. Go on.”

Ranboo takes a deep breath, levelling his voice, *“And Theseus smiled, and Tommy could tell he was, as he reached behind his neck to a strap at the back, to the one thing keeping his identity hidden away, the one thing keeping Tommy on the tips of his toes to this day—”*

“That’s not how the mask works?” It’s just a fuckin’ medical mask that was slightly altered —”

“Shut it!”

“Sorry.”

“An ear-shattering noise shot through the tense air, a shrill of a siren seething as the world erupted into white, as a black encased the corners of Tommy’s vision bare. It seems the Heroes had arrived.”

“Oh fuck I *did* betray Theseus.”

“Just. In. Fucking. Time.” Ranboo reads the last bit, and sniffs. He shoves the phone into Tommy’s chest and throws himself back onto the couch and shakes his fists at the ceiling. He

glares at Tommy and Tommy shuffles under the glare.

“Sorry,” Tommy mutters, “In my defence. I didn’t mean to.”

Ranboo looks at Tubbo and Tubbo shrugs. “I mean, Theseus was a prick.”

Tommy stares up.

The internet.

What can he say?

He looks at Ranboo and Tubbo, then back at the TV. That isn’t on, but it’s still there. They’re laughing and arguing. They’re not hungry or at risk of being thrown out of their apartment.

Everything’s alright.

Life... life is good.

Going to work the next day is quite a simple affair.

He stuffs the wrapped presents into his bag, and takes the train.

Despite Wilbur requesting to drive him there, Tommy declines and instead has a small nap on the train.

He walks into the tower.

Then is promptly picked up by none other than Mister Wilbur Soot, who slings him over his shoulder. Tommy sighs, but lets it happen.

He doesn't have many other options.

"For someone who looks so fuckin' scrawny," Tommy says, "You're surprisingly strong."

Wilbur sighs, "Fuck off."

Tommy shrugs.

He's carried into the elevator, where he is finally placed on the floor. He's grateful for... you know, being able to walk. One of those things that are pretty important to him.

Wilbur looks at the buttons.

As does Tommy.

Tommy reaches for it, at the same time Wilbur does. He pushes Wilbur to the side and Wilbur responds by grabbing Tommy's arm and trying to yank him back.

Tommy breaks free and manages to press the button.

"Get fucked!" Tommy yells, jumping up and down.

"I am taking back your present!" Wilbur yells, "I can have it all to myself."

“No, wait, Wilbur please.”

Wilbur laughs as the elevator opens and Tommy tries to shove Wilbur into the floor. It doesn't go very well.

Techno looks up from his spot on the couch, “Oi. Child. Come open our presents.”

Tommy looks at the small pile underneath the tree. He grabs his presents out of his backpack and settles them under the tree. He glances at all the presents, then at Phil again.

“Go for it.”

Tommy sits down in front of the huge printed tree. He drags the presents towards him. He has four. Two from Wilbur, one from Phil and a small box from Techno.

He looks up at Phil expectantly. Phil nods and Tommy picks up the box from Phil. He rips at the paper.

It's a jumper. He's not terribly shocked by this, he looks at it for a long moment before unfolding it.

"Is this—" Tommy shrieks before looking at Phil.

"Customised Philza merch," Phil finishes. "I was gonna put that you were the number one Philza fan on the back, but decided against it."

Tommy nods.

It's a black hoodie, apart from the '*Philza*' across the front of it in red writing. Apparently all the Philza-merch font is Phil's own writing.

It's the Theseus colours, Tommy realises. And looks at Techno. Techno just smiles.

"Told him you like black and red."

Tommy glares slightly, but softens at the Philza merch in his hands. It's very soft, and has both of the Philza-Hearts on the sleeves.

He takes off his blue hoodie and pulls on the Philza hoodie.

It's a bit too big, the sleeves cover the palm of his hands, but it's perfect.

"Thank you!" Tommy grins at Phil who grins back just as wide. He folds up the blue hoodie he just took off.

He grabs the next present from the pile, it's from Wilbur.

He rips the paper open with no hesitation. Then stares at the present on his lap.

It's a laptop. Like a good laptop. Not like the one that they found in the garbage and Tubbo rebuilt it.

A good one. One actual people with money get. One that Tommy can not afford in any universe.

He stares at Wilbur, mouth open. "I can't—"

"You can. Think about it, your job requires a laptop. And not a shitty one, consider it as... I dunno. But you have gone above and beyond, on that shitty piece of tech you have at home —"

"Hey!"

Wilbur gives him a look.

He has a point.

Tommy looks down. "I can pay you back—"

"First of all, no you can't. Second of all, I don't need it. Third of all, it's a gift. I wanted to get you something nice."

Tommy sighs. "Thank you, Wil."

"No problem child."

"I didn't get you a laptop," Tommy stares at his present under the tree.

"I don't want a laptop, I don't need a laptop." Wilbur argues, "Stop arguin' with me and open the other gift."

Tommy gently puts the laptop box down, being overly careful. He gets the next gift from Wilbur.

"I have no clue how you have a Switch," Wilbur starts, "I'm guessing you found it and—what's his name?"

"Tubbo." Techno deadpans.

"Fixed it," Wilbur continues. "I had to question Daniel for this, but I got you more games. Animal Crossing, Pokemon— Mario... yeah so."

Tommy stares at all the games that fall out of the wrapping paper. He looks at them then back up at Wilbur. "Thank you." He says, "Seriously."

Wilbur nods. "No problem. If you need more games let me know. I have a couple I don't play anymore."

Tommy stares at both the presents. He stands up and walks over to Wilbur, hugging him.

Wilbur seems a bit confused but hugs him back.

Tommy lets go and walks over to Phil. Hugging around his shoulders, before letting go.

Techno throws a box and Tommy which he catches with one hand. It's wrapped in pig wrapping paper.

"That's my gift," Techno says like Tommy couldn't infer that. "Uh... yeah, enjoy I guess?"

Tommy unfolds this paper, rather than ripping it apart. Techno is glancing at it like it's the most important thing ever, and Tommy will treat it as such.

It's a small white box, which Tommy takes the lid off of.

Inside is a necklace. The gemstone at the end of it is rather small, but it's black with white streaks running through it. It also has a gold chain.

Tommy looks at it, then at Techno.

Techno gives a smile, "I have the same." He untucks a necklace from underneath his hoodie.

Tommy tries not to cry.

"Inside it has a piece of netherite. If that's exposed to air, it'll make my necklace warm. And it should send me a ping to my phone. One that can get through all my privacy settings and stuff."

"How does that work?" Tommy asks, holding the necklace delicately.

Techno waves a hand, "Sam made them. Something about netherite and electrical charges."

Tommy nods. Again, trying to stop himself from crying. "T—thanks."

"Tech— you made him cry," Wilbur groans.

Techno shrugs.

"They look like— Minecraft bedrock," Tommy says. "Like the block. With the white stripes in it."

He blinks back tears to the best of his ability. Which isn't a lot, but it's better than doing nothing.

"Thanks." Tommy whispers.

He fumbles to put on the necklace, but manages to all by himself. Before tucking it underneath the Philza hoodie and letting it hang there. Cool, if he needs Techno... then he can just destroy the necklace.

"My go!" Wilbur yells.

He grabs Tommy's present and rips it open with enthusiasm.

His face drops when he sees the title of the book.

Roof Kicking Etiquette: A Guide

Wilbur looks at Tommy, fury in his eyes. And Tommy just grins brightly at him. It's truthfully very funny.

The room is silent for a moment.

Before Techno bursts out into laughter, "How is that even a book?"

"It's from the 50's!" Tommy grins. He looks at Wilbur. "I can take it back if you want—"

"No way!" Wilbur shakes his head, "This is going on my desk. I gotta study it, for next time I meet Theseus."

Techno glances at Tommy, apparently nervous.

Tommy laughs. "Hold up the book."

Wilbur does so and Tommy takes a photo.

[@arandomintern](#): Look out [@theseusiguess](#), he's evolving [\[media attached\]](#)

Wilbur's phone buzzes and Wilbur glares at Tommy. "I hate you," Wilbur's voice is deadpan but he's smiling.

Just slightly. More than enough to make Tommy grin back.

Techno huffs and reaches for his own present. He unfolds the wrapping paper and his mouth falls open.

The book is beautiful, with the golden dragon and Chinese characters. It's red itself, and almost makes Tommy want to read it.

"Tommy— how much was this?"

"Less than Wil's."

"Tommy—"

"It's fine," Tommy says and means it. "It's the least I could do."

"I feel like I'm missing something," Wilbur says, "Are we missing something?"

"Shut up, Wilbur." Techno says, still looking at Tommy. He looks at the book. "*Tommy*."

"You have that old ratty copy," Tommy adds. "You deserve a good one. Maybe you can make new notes."

"I don't think you can afford this."

"It was on sale," Tommy lies, "Seriously, it doesn't matter."

Techno looks skeptical but puts the book down on the floor gently, with the same amount of care that Tommy treated the new laptop. He shakes his head slightly at Tommy, before throwing a chunk of wrapping paper at him.

"Fuckin' stupid," Techno says.

Tommy shrugs, and grins as he does so. He responds by pelting his own bit of wrapping paper at Techno.

Phil sighs at the pair of them and reaches for his own gift. It's in a small box that Tommy found. He may have stolen it, but these guys don't need to know it. It was like fifty cents and the store was closed.

There might be a video of Theseus breaking into a store and taking a single box. But that is *far* besides the point.

Phil opens the box and gasps. "Crows!"

“Huh?” Wilbur cranes over and looks at the little crows. “Look! It’s us!”

Techno stands up and looks in the box, before looking at Tommy with a smile.

“Tommy!” Wilbur coos, “That’s so sweet.”

“No don’t—”

“Awww, Tommy!”

“Fuck off!” Tommy yells, as Wilbur tries to hug him.

He runs behind the couch, and Wilbur runs after him. Trying to hug him. Tommy hits him in the stomach and Wilbur shoves Tommy.

Tommy stumbles before landing on the ground with a thump.

Before glaring at Wilbur.

“Don’t tell Dad—”

“Phil!” Tommy screeches, “Wilbur pushed me.”

“Shut, shut, shut it. He’s fine! Dad, he’s okay!”

“I am in pain! I am bleeding everywhere, Phil! Your son is a bully.”

Phil sighs, “The moment was nice while it lasted. Wilbur, I expect better from you.”

Wilbur huffs and walks off, sitting next to Phil and Tommy pops up behind the couch and looks over Phil’s shoulder.

“They’re very cute, mate,” Phil smiles, “I’ll put them on the shelf behind my desk.”

“You mean where the important things go?” Wilbur asks, bouncing up and down on the couch. “Like... Techno’s friendship card or the hat I got you?”

“Exactly like that,” Phil smiles.

Tommy’s phone buzzes, and Tommy sighs.

It’s from Tubbo. That’s odd because Tubbo is... Tubbo doesn't often call him while he’s at work. He doesn’t normally call Tommy at all, they text all the time.

Tommy squints at it before slowly raising it to his ear.

Wilbur laughs loudly and Techno snorts at something Phil says.

“Tubbo?”

“Tommy, Tommy, Tommy it’s fucking— it’s— that bastard. I knew we couldn’t— it’s fucking. Dickhead, I fuckin’ hate him—”

Tommy looks at Techno, Wilbur and Phil and promptly walks into the next room. They're too happy, and Tubbo is too stressed to see whatever conversation that is about to take place, to take place.

"Woah, woah, slow down. Everything's fine. You're safe, I'm safe. Breathe."

Tubbo takes a deep and shaky breath from the other side of the line. *"I got through to the files I wanted for Ranboo. Okay and— and then— fuck— he."*

"Slow down, okay. Just tell me what's up."

Another deep breath, *"It's Schlatt. Ranboo's last registered workplace was with some sort of transport company. And that's funny right, so I look into this transport company right— and it's fucking owned by Schlatt."*

"Wait, what?" Tommy whispers, "You think—"

"Well it's tied to his company!" Tubbo screeches, *"And... I dunno, it's not a very Schlatt move but maybe there's people behind the scenes or something. I don't know! I'm going to fuckin' kill him."*

"Tubbo, Tubbo, I need you to calm down."

"I'm going," Tubbo says, *"I'll go to their offices."*

"Tubbo no—"

Tubbo hangs up the phone.

Tommy stares at the screen for a moment, before opening the door and looking at Techno who's looking at him curiously.

He struggles to find the words for a moment, "Tubbo is going to commit a homicide, can I knock off early?"

Phil blinks at him. "Uh. Sure?"

"Cool," Tommy shoves his phone into his pocket before looking at all the gifts. He does not trust himself to bring any of them to a potential homicide. Instead he sighs sadly, "Really sorry about this— thank you so much."

"No problem, Toms," Wilbur says, and there's a disgusting amount of affection in his voice. Tommy screws up his face.

"Um. Give the stuff to— Daniel. Really sorry, but I am legitimately scared for Schlatt's safety—"

"Wait, what?" Wilbur asks.

Tommy slings his backpack over his back, sprinting to the elevator where he hits the ground floor button.

He wants to swear. He wants to do a lot of things.

Most of them involve staying here, and letting himself enjoy a break. Letting himself be happy and removing himself from the clusterfuck his life is turning into. Slowly but surely his life is a mess.

Tommy runs a hand down his face.

And sometimes... when he finally can't escape his thoughts. Something in him wishes he'd never become Theseus.

Is what he's done really worth it?

He shakes his head. The elevator opens.

Time to stop a homicide...

What a way to spend Swinter.

Chapter End Notes



MEME MADE BY PIXEL, THANK YOU!!!

Chapter Summary:

SO! Some important things that happened this chapter

- This interaction, very important for their characters:

“Ha, okay,” Tommy snorts, “Yes. Give up your family for a kid who has only made your life worse.”

Techno looks at Tommy. That heavy look in his eyes again. “Now, the thing with that statement. Is that it implies you aren’t family.”

- We discover that Dream gets in trouble a lot and his job is constantly hanging in the balance

- Sapnap is protesting the fact he can not date (that’s why Dream gets in trouble)

- Tommy can chirp, something he did not know he could do until Phil chirps first.

- Also, Hot Sugar. A fanfiction about Tommy & Theseus, which both Ranboo and Tubbo read. Tommy finds it weird, but also hilarious since... you know he is Theseus.

- Techno gets him a necklace, which is also like an emergency tracker thing. They both have one, and therefore are bedrock bros

- Tubbo figures out what the files say, and that leads to one of Schlatt’s sister companies. And that Tubbo is about to fucking kill Schlatt, which makes Tommy leave because he can not have Schlatt dead.

Hi everyone! Happy holidays wherever you are. I hope you're well, this has been written since about mid-December. (Around the... 10th maybe.) It was super fun to write, and I'm so glad I got this out on time. Now this one goes out to some of the people who have made my life better since last Christmas (sorry if I don't name you, I can't name everyone, I only have a certain amount of characters to write with)

Clay! Sky! Cress! Power Trio. Thank you so much for everything you've done for me, you probably don't know it either. But you have all been an important part of both Crimes & Tea and my life. And Sky... you're very scary.

Twilight fucking Sparkles, I could spend the rest of my word limit talking about how important you are to me and we both know it. ALSO HAPPY FUCKING CHRISTMAS, HOT SUGAR IS CANON. You've done a lot for me as a human, and I can not thank you enough for what you've done for me. I just... don't have enough words or know how to use the words.

ALL MY FRIENDS, LITERALLY ALL OF YOU. QUILL, SNOW, PISTOL, NOOP, I COULD GO ON AND ON. CAIT, ELAS, SERVER, FUCKING EVERYONE

I have so many more people I want to thank wtf. Apollo and Fig, my literal children. I can't say a lot about you because I'd be talking forever. Just thanks, for everything. You don't even know you've done it, but you have done a lot for me. Both of you (even if you started a war Apollo, and even if Fig you claim that you wrote TINAAOS.) Thank you!

Everyone who has ever done art or written anything based off of my fics, OKAY I LOVE YOU ALL SO MUCH <33 /p. EVERYONE WHO READS TINAAOS, OR *ANY* of my fics. I owe you all a lot, I might know your name or anything about you but thank you for changing my life. I feel a bit sappy speaking to this. But so many of you mean so much to me, I've probably fucking forgotten half the names of people I need to thank.

Everyone in the discord server. HOLY FUCK /pos. You are chaotic little shits, and sometimes I want to delete the server /j. But you are all so lovely and welcoming, you're chaotic fucks, but you're my favourite chaotic fucks. And I might get bullied for this, but that's okay. I was gonna go into more detail, but I won't do that. Just know I care about you all, even if you've sent one message, or you've sent 30k messages. Thank you for joining and spending some time with the chaotic fuckers. /pos

Happy Holidays everyone, thanks for being here!

Also formal apology for making Hot Sugar canon, but also... it's funny and a present to both Twi and the general discord server <333

You can read Hot Sugar (the fanfic Ranboo reads, [HERE](#))

In Which Tommy Stops A Homicide

Chapter Summary

tommy vs. tubbo
tommy vs. his issues
he only wins one of those battles

Chapter Notes

Sup fuckers. There is a chapter summary at the end, minor warning because the meme has a mention of guns.

Also I was going to be subtle... but fuck that... there's a little *something, something* happening VERY SOON... and I would recommend joining the discord and following this [Twitter account](#). Especially if you like mysteries.

Warnings: knives, talks of homicide, mentions of guns, self destructive behaviour

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy sees Tubbo before Tubbo sees Tommy. This is a fucking blessing in disguise because that gives Tommy the advantage of seeing Tubbo and some surprise advantage.

Tubbo has a knife.

Sometimes he hates how well Tubbo knows him because Tubbo spins around completely.

There are people around them, walking up and down the footpath.

Tubbo spies Tommy, before turning around and bringing up his hood. Walking a little bit faster. He tries to hide in the crowd of people, but Tommy can see the way his shoulders are hunched.

Tommy follows after him, putting up his own hood and darting forwards. He follows Tubbo for a bit longer, before darting past someone and speeding up even more.

Tubbo glances over his shoulder, apparently over aware of Tommy walking after him. They make eye contact and Tubbo breaks into a run.

A moment later so does Tommy, he shoves someone to the side (not with a huge amount of force, just gently. Like... pushing someone slightly, it's almost funny.) He runs a bit further, and Tubbo is... a freakish amount in front of him.

At this rate, he's getting to Schlatt before Tommy is, and probably murdering Schlatt. (And probably getting away with it too, knowing Tubbo.)

He can't let this happen, Tommy doesn't need the only person who knows anything about Deo, dead.

Tommy flicks his hand.

It's like someone snaked a hand around Tubbo's ankle because he trips and falls onto his face. Lots of people pause, probably to check if he's okay, and Tommy catches up to him.

"I'm okay, thanks," Tubbo says politely. Before looking at Tommy hatred in his eyes. Straight away he drops that look and looks at Tommy with fake fear.

Oh. This bitch is gaslighting—

"Stay away from me!" Tubbo yells, scrambling onto his feet.

"Are you fucking kidding me, Leo?" Tommy can play this game too, and he will be winning.
"Come on, Mum's gonna be so mad at us."

Tubbo tries to step back, but Tommy grabs his arm. "Come on, Leo. Mum's already not happy with us—"

"Get away from me!" Tubbo yells, getting his arm free.

Tommy grabs the back of his hoodie and yanks. He looks at someone watching and gives a sympathetic smile, "Sorry," he says.

Then he picks up Tubbo. Under the armpits before putting him in a fireman's carry, Tubbo to his credit tries to fight.

They both know that Tubbo can't fight to his full ability without causing a scene.

Tommy carries him a bit further, before turning down an alley and putting Tubbo on the ground. Tubbo's first response is to punch Tommy in the gut and break for a run.

Flicking his hand, Tubbo is dragged back and he topples onto the ground.

"Fuck!" Tubbo yells.

"What the fuck are you doing?" Tommy hisses. "You can't just fucking kill someone."

Tubbo sits on the ground. His arms are crossed, and he's being held back with a strand of red energy.

"Fucking bet?" Tubbo hisses back.

"No way! You're not killing anyone, not Schlatt, not anyone—"

"He's obviously connected to the rings!" Tubbo yells, fighting against the energy holding him in place. "You know how much those fucked Boo and I up— I can't—"

Tommy takes a few steps forwards before crouching at Tubbo's level. He's glaring a lot, and Tommy can't even blame him for that.

"You don't know half the shit Ranboo went through! He doesn't know half the shit he went through, I remember it all Tommy! *I fucking remember it all*."

"I know," Tommy says gently, he drops the magic from around Tubbo and he stays there. "I know Tubbo."

"Ranboo didn't lose his first fight," Tubbo whispers, something broken in his voice. "He was *really* good. Scarily, I don't know what they did to him but— he was really good at what he did. They called him the new... whatever the fuck, and he was terrifying."

Tommy nods.

"Then he got a hit to the head that probably should've killed him and he forgot everything. Then he lost that fight and— I couldn't let him go when I left."

"Tubbo—"

"That fighting ring ruined his life," Tubbo says, standing up. "And I'm gonna—"

"It's okay," Tommy says. "Tubbo. It's okay. You did what you could."

"I was there of my own free will!" Tubbo yells. "I could've done so much more!"

"Tubbs, you didn't know what was happening—"

"I did!" Tubbo yells.

They both pause, Tubbo's wiping at his eyes.

"I knew," Tubbo says slowly, like the words hurt more than anything in the world. "That people were there against their will. I didn't know they were dying. But I knew—"

"You were a kid." Tommy whispers. "What were you supposed to do?"

"Something!" Tubbo yells.

Tommy takes another step forward.

Tubbo throws himself at Tommy, and Tommy wraps his arms around Tubbo. He buries his nose into Tommy's jumper and just... cries.

Tommy holds him tightly as he sniffles and cries. Something about it is heartbreaking, and another part is expected.

His shoulders shake from the sobs, and Tommy hugs him harder. He might snap Tubbo's ribs but neither of them seem to care a whole lot. He hiccups dangerously, and Tommy rubs his back.

It's extremely forceful crying too, Tommy hasn't seen Tubbo this upset in a while. He's somewhat aware of Tubbo getting snot on his new Philza hoodie, but some things are more important. Tubbo is one of them.

Tubbo pulls away from Tommy, before turning to face the wall. He retches and Tommy winces.

He retches again, and this time something actually comes out of his mouth.

Tommy makes a noise, he'd probably call it a chirp in a different situation. However, that is a problem to put on the backburner.

Tubbo looks at Tommy, holding onto the wall with one arm.

Being completely honest, Tubbo has had better days. His eyes are red, his face is splotchy and his hair's a mess. He looks exactly like someone who cried so hard they threw up.

"You've had better days, I'll admit it Tubbo."

Tubbo laughs, it's slightly shaky. And it sounds like he's about to burst into tears, but it's there.

"Fucking—" Tubbo mutters, and is apparently destined to never finish that sentence because he shakes his head. "Sorry."

"Nope!"

"I am."

"Nope," Tommy adds with a grin.

Tubbo rolls his eyes, before sighing and resting his forehead against the brick. "I can't kill Schlatt."

"No."

"I couldn't even if I wanted to— he's done too much for me."

"Yeah," Tommy mutters.

"He thinks I'm dead, y'know? Faked my death after Quackity fucking ruined everything. Warehouse explosion."

"Oh."

"Yeah," Tubbo nods, "Had to get away from my parents, so— I blew up the warehouse."

"Did it work?"

"Yeah..." Tubbo mutters, "They moved back to England. That's what Mum's social media says anyway."

Tubbo sighs, long and tiredly.

"Now Schlatt thinks I'm dead, and I didn't exactly know how to bring out that I'm not. I can't just go over and be like, *'hey, remember me? The kid you saved from his parents? Yeah, I'm actually alive!'* Imagine how that would go down."

Tommy thinks about it for a moment, "Let's go to the bench."

"The bench?" Tubbo asks, "Oh no—"

"Make a plan," Tommy explains. "We've figured out more difficult stuff on that bench."

"I mean yeah, but..."

Tommy sighs, but Tubbo obliges, somewhat begrudgingly following after.

They don't have to take a train, which is nice.

The walk is surprisingly short, Tubbo didn't get very far.

Especially at Tnret park, as they enter.

There are some teenagers ditching school, some toddlers... doing toddler things. There's a group of kids too, and one is throwing sticks at another. People are laughing and generally being shitheads.

Floating around is what Tommy assumes to be a shulker hybrid, as their feet barely touch the ground as they soar around their friends. They also have some thick patches of purple on their arms.

Tommy smiles at that, and Tubbo pulls a face. "Shulker hybrids scare me."

"Wasn't your dad a shulker hybrid?"

“Yes.”

“Oh,” Tommy says, as the shulker hybrid flies too high and falls onto the grass. Laughter erupts from their direction and Tommy continues walking.

Tubbo still looks like a mess, but a bit less of a mess. So Tommy has that going for him, at least. They trudge over to the familiar bench, someone is sitting there. Tommy recognises them and waves.

“Irene.”

“Thomas,” she says with a smile. She has a rather thick accent, Tommy thinks it’s Russian.

Tubbo says it’s Northern Russian. But Tommy doesn’t know how to tell Russian accents apart. Apparently Tubbo can, he also thinks that Tubbo could speak Russian. Maybe he still can, Tubbo’s languages are a mess anyway.

She’s a short lady, Tommy will be the first to admit that. With wispy white hair, and a huge smile on her face. Tommy can’t remember if he had grandparents, but Irene might be the closest thing to a grandparent. If Tommy closes his eyes, he can almost see Irene as a loving grandparent.

“Hi!” Tommy grins.

“Привет,” Tubbo says with a nod of his head. Irene smiles a bit brighter and nods her head back. “And that’s where my Russian skills stop, hey, Irene.”

“Hello, Tubbo,” she says. The word Tubbo has always been a bit awkward coming out of her mouth, and this time is no exception. “Thomas, how have you been?”

Tubbo gestures at his own face, “I just cried so hard I threw up. Not great.”

“Oh,” Irene says softly, she reaches into a handbag that has been placed on the ground. Where she pulls out a few dollar notes and presses them into Tubbo’s hand.

Tubbo smiles but shakes his head. “We don’t need this Irene. Tommy’s gotten a job, with the heroes.”

“You’re a hero? Irene asks, she spits the last word. Tommy has mixed feelings about that as well.

“No, no, no,” Tommy shakes his head with a little huff. “Not a hero. I just work for them, office work.”

“Ah,” Irene nods, “Take the money, Tubbo.”

“Irene, really—”

Tubbo knows he’s not going to win this fight, so he mumbles a thank you before handing the money over to Tommy who puts it in his wallet. Irene smiles slightly more, and Tubbo can’t help but smile too.

He sits down next to Irene and Tommy stays standing.

“What is bothering you?” Irene asks.

Tubbo sighs, before looking at Tommy. Tommy shrugs. “Irene... say if someone you really cared about was involved with something you don’t agree with at all. Something you *hate* more than anything... like if Tommy was a superhero.”

Irene nods.

“Then... then what would you do?” Tubbo asks.

Moments like these make Tommy realise just how young they all are. Sometimes he remembers it again and something in his chest hurts a little.

Irene hums for a moment, before looking at Tommy.

“If Thomas ever became a hero, I would be furious with him. However, I’m not sure if this example is the best for you.”

“No,” Tubbo mutters, “No, it isn’t.” He takes another deep breath. “Someone I knew... for a long time, has connections to underground fighting rings. Something that took, so much from one of my friends. That ruins lives.”

“Do you know for certain?”

“I know his company is.”

Irene hums, leaning back against the bench. “I think...” Irene says slowly, “Approach him about it. Maybe have a little bit of fun with it too, I think you’ve earned it.”

She stands up, brushing off invisible dust and giving Tubbo a smile. With a small huff, she reaches into her handbag and pulls out a knife.

Tommy feels the spark shoot off his hand, but he promptly ignores it. And hopes everyone else does too. Considering no one is giving him an odd look, he’d call it an absolute win for himself.

“Here,” Irene says, pressing the handle of the knife into Tubbo’s hand.

It’s a hunting knife, and one that appears to be in good quality too.

“I shall leave you two to it,” Irene says walking off in the opposite direction. “Give them Hell.”

Tubbo stares at the knife and then at Irene. His mouth is open in complete and utter shock. Why does Irene have a knife? Tommy has no clue, he stares at the knife in shock.

Before collapsing on the bench next to Tubbo.

For a long moment they’re both silent and staring at the knife.

Eventually Tommy manages to find his voice. “I didn’t dream that... right?”

“I—” Tubbo pokes Tommy with the knife and Tommy yelps. “Right...” he mutters. For a moment longer they both sit there.

Another moment.

“Okay. Now what?” Tubbo asks, “I have a knife.”

Tommy shrugs, looking down to his left.

In the wood on the bench there’s a little nick. That is where Tubbo tried to stab him the first time, and Tommy had ducked out of the way. The knife had gotten stuck, there’s another slightly larger nick in the wood. This is where Tubbo tried to stab Tommy the second time, he’d almost hit too.

With a sigh, he looks over his shoulder into the slightly rotting wood of the bench. Tubbo's, Ranboo's and his own name were shakily scratched into the bench. Tommy smiles at it, running his finger over the names.

"Huh," Tommy muses.

Tubbo is also looking at it, with something that Tommy would call fond, easily. He smiles and looks back at Tommy. "I tried to kill you here."

"Twice," Tommy says grinning. "Three times if we're counting Ranboo throwing me into the bench then you grabbing a knife."

"I apologised for that! And Ranboo cried for *so* long afterwards."

Tommy laughs at the memory, leaning back against the bench. He looks at Tubbo and smiles, "I'm glad you tried to kill me that day. I'm glad we met."

Tubbo grins back, just as wide.

"I'm glad I met you."

"Clingy," Tommy mutters, leaning into the bench more. "But I'm glad I met you, even if I still have a scar on my arm—"

"Oi! Ya fuck!" Tubbo yells, and Tommy laughs.

They laugh for a moment longer.

The silence settles and Tommy sighs, “What’s the plan Tubbo?”

Tubbo hums, “I think. I go there. I threaten him for the company files— I... won’t hurt him, and you’ll be there to help me.”

Tommy nods. “Of course.”

“Like old times, huh,” Tubbo laughs.

Tommy rolls his eyes, “You went out in the Theseus suit *once*. ”

“You still shadowed me the entire night, clingy behaviour if you ask me.”

“I AM NOT CLINGY!”

Eventually they leave the bench, Tubbo looks so much more put together. Even as he puts the knife in his hoodie and there’s a certain sternness in his eyes that Tommy barely recognises.

Tubbo sets his shoulders back, and they start walking.

Schlatt’s offices aren’t too far away, so they just walk rather than taking the train. It’s a very chill time, Tubbo is talking about something to do with nuclear codes. It’s quite funny too, to listen to Tubbo explain nuclear physics.

Then in front of them looms Schlatt’s office, it stands in front of them with some sort of unspoken past. Judging by the look in Tubbo’s eyes this is familiar, maybe too familiar.

It’s not a small building, but it’s a couple of storeys high. Maybe five or six? Unlike the tower which is disgustingly high up. Tommy tries not to feel sick looking at the top floors, and he

balls his hands into fists.

This is fine.

Heights? Are great, he loves heights. They're amazing!

Tubbo takes a deep breath, before approaching the door. He swings it open and stands in the doorway for a moment.

Tommy follows after him, gently nudging Tubbo towards the receptionist.

He's difficult to move, but Tommy manages it and Tubbo snaps back into being

Tubbo takes a deep breath, setting his shoulders back and standing up a little bit taller. He approaches the receptionist with the confidence of someone who does this every day. Tommy follows after him.

Tommy is... mostly damage control, which is a nice change from it being the other way around. Tubbo takes another deep breath and shakes out his hands.

"What do I say?"

"Whatever you need to, Tubbo," Tommy says.

Tubbo nods, something setting in his eyes as he approaches the receptionist's desk. He sets his shoulders again, and his posture straightens up more. He looks... a lot taller and a lot more intimidating than he has in a long time.

He knocks on the desk, and the receptionist spins around from their computer to look at Tubbo. “I request a meeting with Schlatt—”

“He isn’t taking meetings at the moment, sorry.”

“Tell him that Tobias Reeves is here,” Tubbo says, looking at the intercom thing on the desk.

“No can do, sorry, he’s explicitly stated that he’s not to be disturbed—”

Tubbo sighs. “The sky’s cloudy in the North, don’tcha think? Don’t want it to start raining now, do we?”

The receptionist’s eyes go wide, and they reach towards the intercom, picking up the phone part of it and pressing a few buttons. Tubbo taps his fingers on the desk and shoots Tommy a look.

Tommy looks at the receptionist, then back at Tubbo. ‘*Why?*’ He mouths.

Tubbo waves a hand, apparently he’s explaining that later then.

“Hello— yes I know I was told not to disturb you. I was not planning too,” the receptionist looks at Tubbo and Tubbo just gives a bright smile. “We have someone here to discuss the weather.”

Tommy hopes these are code words. Considering the way Tubbo’s mouth quirks up into a real smile, that must be something relevant. Tubbo sighs, before beckoning Tommy forwards who follows.

“I’ll send him up now,” the receptionist says easily. They put down the phone and look at Tubbo, eyes clearly confused. “Tobias, you and your friend are free to go up.”

“Thanks,” Tubbo grins, “Call me Tubbo though.”

Something like recognition flashes in the receptionist’s eyes, and Tubbo laughs to himself. Grabbing Tommy’s hand and dragging him towards the elevator.

They both step into the elevator as they hear the receptionist scramble to pick up the intercom again.

Tubbo hits a button, not quite looking at it. It seems like an action out of muscle memory, before he takes a couple of steps backwards. “I really thought he’d change the code words by now.”

“Yeah, what was that about?”

“When I was here, he’d have code words if anyone needed him. He has different ones depending on whether they’re business partners, friends, family— then he differs the ones between gangs because he needs to know who exactly—” Tubbo cuts himself off and straightens his back.

“Tubbo... was he ever—”

The unspoken hangs in the air. Both of them know what Tommy’s talking about.

“No,” Tubbo says, firm in his voice. “Never.”

“Okay,” Tommy looks forward again as the elevator whirls. “Never? Not just physical... there’s more types of abuse—”

“No,” Tubbo says, and he sounds so certain. “Okay? Schlatt was great. Much better than my parents, and he actually cared.”

“Okay. Just checking.”

“What about Deo?”

“Same as you and Schlatt, apparently.”

Tubbo nods, “Good. I’d track him down and kill him otherwise,” Tubbo shifts on his feet, “Wish I could do the same with your parents.”

“Do I need to track down your parents?”

Tubbo huffs, “Nah. I’ll just drain their accounts one day, give it all to charity.”

“Cool.”

The elevator doors open, and Tubbo brings out the knife from his hoodie pocket. Before walking down the hallway, towards what looks like the most fucking ominous door ever. It’s a heavy old wooden door.

This floor is decorated a lot older than the bottom floor, which is almost ultra modern. The floors are a dark mahogany with rich dark green carpets lining some parts of the floor. Tubbo walks ahead easily.

The door at the end of the hallway opens.

Sure enough, it's Schlatt. Standing there with wide eyes, like he's seeing a ghost. And... if what Tubbo says is true, then for all intents and purposes Schlatt *should* think that Tubbo's dead.

They both stare at each other for a long moment.

"Tubbo?" Schlatt whispers.

Like that, something has apparently kicked in Tubbo's brain, because he stalks over. Holding the knife.

Schlatt takes a few uneasy steps back, but Tubbo keeps walking forwards. "You have five minutes to explain yourself, before I slit your throat and make it look like an accident. We both know I am perfectly capable of that Schlatt, so I would fuckin' recommend you start talking now."

"You're alive," Schlatt says. And he sounds just... ecstatic over that fact, like everything in the world is better because of it. "I thought—"

"Don't worry about me," Tubbo snaps, poking Schlatt with the knife and Schlatt takes some steps back into his office.

Tommy follows after them, arms crossed, not planning on intervening. Yet. But if Tubbo goes too far, then he'll intervene. The ethics of this are... dodgy at best, horrendous at worst. For some reason, Tommy doesn't care.

The office is nice however. Despite how high up it is—

Oh fuck. They're high up.

Like *really* high up.

Tommy ignores the panic rising in his own chest, and instead focuses on the office. It's a rather big room. It has a large dark green almost Victorian-era carpet on the ground. A desk in the middle, a couple of wires leading to the desk. There are papers across the desk and pens strewn across the floor.

On one side of the room is a bookshelf that is completely full and almost overflowing, next to the wall is another pile of books which obviously doesn't fit on the bookshelf.

On the other side of the room, there's a workshop area. It's a long wooden bench which has bits and pieces of electronics, wires. Above the workshop area is a huge cork board, which has maths and designs and other things that Tommy doesn't understand slightly. He's sure Tubbo understands though.

Tubbo draws the knife away. Not looking away from Schlatt, he points at Tommy. "Close the door."

Tommy obliges, closing the door with a click.

Tubbo glances up, grabbing a mug from off the desk and pelting it at the corner of the room. The cup breaks and a camera falls to the ground in bits.

He grabs another mug, and throws it at another corner of the room. A camera also falls to the ground in pieces. Like he hasn't done anything, Tubbo looks back at Schlatt.

Okay. Yup.

Tubbo is terrifying.

"You're alive," Schlatt says. He has the sort of voice which means he thinks this is some sort of dream, or something apart from what it really is. "How are you—"

“Rigged a warehouse to explode,” Tubbo glares. “It was your warehouse actually, but I think you know about this. I have the funny feeling you beat yourself up about it, wondering if there was anything you could’ve done to make it safer.”

Schlatt takes a step back.

Tubbo’s on a roll here, and he’s not letting up anytime soon. “Then I went to a fighting ring, just as a technology guy— you know. Put to practice what you taught me? Thanks for teaching me how to redirect kinetic energy by the way—”

“You went to a fighting ring?”

“Parents wouldn’t find me there, they needed competent people who wouldn’t ask questions. I’m a lot of things, but I’m not a narc. And so that happened. Then I meet one of my best friends, it does not end well for him. He forgot everything.”

“Huh?”

“Shut up,” Tubbo snaps, gesturing with the knife.

Schlatt shuts up.

“And then, I got outta there because my best friend was about to be killed, for losing a fight. He had to cut off his own tail. That’s all he can remember by the way, then he says that he must’ve lost his first fight and I do not have the courage to tell him that he was one of the best in that fighting ring and everyone compared him to... what the fuck was their name, the Blood God?”

Schlatt just blinks.

“That’s all traumatic. It’s whatever. Then, I’m trying to take down this fighting ring. Tracing my friend’s records back to anything. I’ve known for a while that people’s last employers tend to be the people who took the fighters. What do I find?”

Schlatt doesn’t move.

“Ranboo’s last place of alleged employment, before he was kidnapped. Was part of your fuckin’ bullshit. Under your fucking company.” Tubbo brandishes the knife, holding it against Schlatt’s throat. “You’re gonna fuckin’ tell me anything you know, or I swear to God, you’re gonna wish that Quackity found any solid evidence against you.”

Schlatt takes a deep breath.

Tubbo looks... surprisingly calm.

As does Schlatt.

They both have the same look in their eyes, the same sort of muted terror. Tubbo can hide his better, but not by much.

Huh.

Tommy doesn’t intervene, he knows better than to try. Especially when Tubbo’s like this and not actually hurting anyone. (Yet.)

“I don’t know anything,” Schlatt says evenly. “Okay?”

“You’re fucking lying!” Tubbo yells. “I know you’re lying—”

“Have I ever lied to you?” Schlatt says.

The silence from Tubbo afterwards is telling, as is the expression on his face. If the dictionary had a picture next to the word ‘conflicted’ then Tubbo would be the perfect expression for it.

Tubbo’s hands are shaking, he opens his mouth and closes it again. Before glancing at Tommy, then looking back at Schlatt.

“No.” Tubbo says through gritted teeth.

“Why would I start now?” Schlatt says evenly, he takes a step back away from the knife. Tubbo struggles to move forwards, but he does eventually.

Schlatt uses two fingers to tilt the knife away from his throat.

Tubbo lets it happen, his hands are shaking almost a concerning amount.

He stares at Schlatt, he looks like he’s on the verge of tears. Schlatt does too.

Tommy is definitely intruding.

“You’re gonna—” Tubbo manages. “Give— me access to your company files.”

“Okay,” Schlatt says quietly.

“And you’re gonna—” Something in Tubbo’s voice cracks, and his shoulders shake, like a well repressed sob. “You’re gonna—”

The knife falls to the floor, and Tubbo takes a few steps back shaking his head and covering his face.

He makes a noise, that's a mix between a cry and a laugh.

Tommy watches Schlatt's reaction, it seems to break slightly and he takes a small step forward. He's actually concerned, and the way Schlatt's acting reminds him so much of Deo it almost hurts.

Tubbo peeks out from behind his hands, "I missed you," he confesses quietly. Tommy feels out of place, he's not supposed to hear this. "But— I missed you. I really, really, fuckin' missed you."

Schlatt's expression softens (somehow), even more. "I'm glad you're okay— thank fuck, Tubbo. I thought— I thought you were gone."

And it's selfish.

Something in his mind knows it's selfish, as he walks out of the room and closes the door.

Before leaning against the wall, eyes closed. He presses the palms of his hands against his eyes, willing himself not to cry.

It's fine, it's fine—

"You alright, Sunflower?"

"Stop calling me that. Sunflowers are fuckin' ugly and we both know it."

“Huh. Fits perfectly.” Deo muses, looking up from the knife he’s sharpening. Tommy stares at him, his mouth open, before figuring out something to say.

“I’m telling Wisp!” Tommy yells and darts down the hallway, as Deo chases after him. But Tommy’s laughing so hard he can’t breathe.

Tommy sighs, fucking... emotions. Leaning against the wall he sighs, running a hand down his face and taking a deep breath. Fucking hell. It’s been years, Tommy was the first one to leave anyway, he can’t get sad about something he set into place—

He stands there for a moment.

A moment later Tubbo opens the door, there’s a glint in his eye that wasn’t there before. “You okay?”

Tommy nods, “Yeah... you and Schlatt reminded me of... yeah.”

Tubbo pulls a face and gives Tommy a sympathetic smile, it's not worth a lot, but it's worth something.

With a grin, Tubbo holds a hard drive. Not a fucking USB, and entire hard drive, like it's nothing. He holds it up for Tommy to see, "And this, is what I was looking for."

"What is it?"

"All of Schlatt's files relating to the company to his knowledge. I'll run a scan against the servers to see if he's been locked out of anything or if there's stuff on desktops that hasn't been automatically uploaded onto the system or got bypassed if the server was too busy—"

Tommy stares at him. "You are such a fucking nerd."

"I am finding a way back into the underworld if it fuckin' kills me. And I am taking down every single one of those rings. Mark my words."

"I'll mark 'em down right alongside the Spider-Man suit you promised to make me."

Tubbo stares at him, some sort of fury in his eyes. "Do you know how impractical that would be? First of all think of the chaffing, second of all— that's not at all practical for your brand or power set."

Turning around, Tubbo flings the door open. "Out!" He yells at Schlatt, "I'm doing my tests, can't have you fuckin' with them."

Schlatt snorts, and walks out of the room both hands in the air. Like he's humouring a child.

Apparently, it works because Tubbo goes into the room and closes it.

Schlatt looks at Tommy.

Tommy doesn't move from leaning against the wall, instead, he crosses his arms and stares directly opposite him.

"If Tubbo finds you have any involvement he *will* kill you. We both know he can, and get away with it."

Schlatt doesn't react, much to his credit. After so long dealing with gangs, someone can probably school and restrain their reactions.

Tommy stares at the wall with more force.

"Is Deo alive?"

"I don't know," Schlatt confesses, quick and straight to the point. "He got out of L'Manberg alive. He was alive in South-East Russia and on the move. He hasn't contacted me since."

Tommy pauses, still glaring at the walk like it ruined his life.

Schlatt doesn't press him either, they both know he has something to say and Schlatt doesn't push it.

He's starting to understand why Tubbo likes the guy.

"I— do you still have a way to contact him?" Tommy's voice breaks slightly but he manages to ignore it and hopes Schlatt will too. "Like a phone number or— I dunno. Anything?"

Schlatt shakes his head, "Sorry kid. Saw him in person before Business Bay fell, then he told me he made it to Russia and that was it. Phone calls don't get through, I imagine he destroyed the phone."

"Fuck." That is what Tommy says, because he's not sure what else he can say. "It's been... four years. Almost five."

"Two since I've seen him, mate." Schlatt says with a shoulder shrug. "Also drop the accent."

"Fuck you, I like my accent."

"No one will ever take you seriously with it," Schlatt says, his accent dropping into something more familiar.

"Good," Tommy grins, looking at Schlatt. "I don't want them to stop underestimating me, makes it real easy for me."

Schlatt just stares for a long moment, blinking a couple of times. "Huh. Interesting."

"Yeah."

"Does Wilbur know?" Schlatt asks.

Tommy looks at him. "About?"

"Y'know," Schlatt waves his hands around. "The thing."

"The thing?"

With a shrug Schlatt reaches into his suit pocket and pulls out Tommy's phone.

The one he dropped at the gala.

His stomach drops.

It's fried now, anyone can see that. Tubbo clearly did a good job of that... just not good enough.

They weren't quick enough.

Schlatt hands the broken phone to Tommy who takes it. His mouth is open and he stares at the broken phone.

"I'm not going to tell him," Schlatt laughs, "I'm loyal to my friends, but even I know telling Wil would be a jail sentence for you."

Tommy shuffles on his feet and opens his mouth to say something, but nothing manages to come out of his mouth. He throws the phone against the ground and it smashes.

Schlatt just raises an eyebrow.

"If you fuckin' say anything, to anyone—" Tommy cuts himself off and glances at the door, "I'll set Tubbo on you— I'll fuckin' set on you."

Schlatt snickers, "Okay kid."

Tommy glances in the corner. There is a camera, he does not need that to record this. He flicks his wrist and a moment later the camera in the corner falls to the ground next to Schlatt.

Schlatt looks at it, then back at Tommy, apparently impressed. At least slightly.

"Look this isn't one of your fucking power plays. Tubbo's freedom depends on this secret staying that. Harboring and helping vigilantes can also end him in Pandora. And I am not letting them go to fucking Pandora's and you're not going to be the reason that happens."

Schlatt raises an eyebrow. Again. The fucker.

"Bold words from someone who could call Wilbur right now," Schlatt reaches for his phone.

The reaction from Tommy is immediate and not his fault. Tommy reaches his hand out towards the phone that Schlatt is holding in his hand.

There's a spark.

Schlatt yelps and lets go of his phone.

His phone that is now smoking on the ground. Completely fried.

What the fuck.

Schlatt stares at it. Then stares at Tommy.

"You fried my phone?"

"It was an accident!" Tommy yells, "It's not like I have control over it—"

"You fucking don't have control over it?" Schlatt yells back.

"I didn't know I could do that!" Tommy returns.

"Fucking what now?" Schlatt yells, he sighs, running a hand down his face. "Let me get this straight. You are debatably the most powerful person, abilities wise in L'Manberg. And you can't fucking control your powers?"

"I can!" Tommy defends, "Just... not when I'm emotional."

“You’re shitting me.”

“No?”

Schlatt sighs, giving Tommy a tired look. It’s quite similar to the one that Puffy tends to give out to people. Almost eerily so. “And I thought Tubbo was a wreck of a human.”

“You were going to tell Wilbur!”

“Was not!”

“Yes you were.”

Schlatt glares at Tommy. “You fuck I wasn’t gonna fuckin’ tell Wilbur.”

“You were gonna be that fuckin prick who picks up the phone and calls him before sayin’ somethin’ completely different! Like a tattletale in school who’d go up to the teacher and say somethin’ completely different and make you terrified for ya school career.”

“How old are you? You’re like a fuckin’ preschooler who cries if they scrape their knee—”

Tommy flicks his wrist, and Schlatt tumbles to the ground. Where Tommy promptly flips him off.

Schlatt grabs the fried phone from off the floor before launching it.

It hits Tommy right in the eye.

Tommy yelps, batting his hand which manages to hit the phone and the phone falls to the ground again. He stares at Schlatt, one eye closed.

“If this fucking bruises, I’m going to fuckin’ kill you.”

Schlatt just gives a slightly apologetic smile, which is worth something at least.

Tommy flips him off, still holding his eye.

Tubbo swings the door open, holding two hard drives. Tommy has no clue where he found the other one. He looks at Tommy holding his eye, then Schlatt on the floor. Before sighing deeply in what Tommy calls the Ranboo™ sigh.

“Schlatt.”

“Tubbo.”

Tubbo just gives Schlatt a look.

Schlatt gives him a look back.

“So—” Tubbo says, shifting on his feet. It’s almost endearing. “Schlatt. Am I allowed back?”

“Into the business?” Schlatt asks with wide eyes, “Absoluetely fucking not. I am not dragging you back into this shit. Not now, not ever—”

“I’m already in deep shit,” Tubbo says, glancing at Tommy then looking back at Schlatt.

Schlatt just gives him a look, one filled with sympathy and concern. “Just... be a kid Tubbo.”

Tubbo opens his mouth, then closes it again. “Okay,” Tubbo says quietly.

“Both of you,” Schlatt says quietly, giving Tommy a look. “You’re both kids. Stop forgetting it.”

Tubbo’s mouth is still half-open, he grabs Tommy’s arm and drags him towards the elevator.

The elevator closes a moment later, and Tubbo stands there. Almost in a daze.

“Tubbo?” Tommy asks slowly.

Tubbo gives him a shaky smile. “Yeah?”

“I’m here, if you need to talk about *anything*. Anything, okay? I won’t judge you... unless it’s about pineapple on pizza then I’ll judge you.”

“I know,” Tubbo mutters. “I... yeah.”

The walk home is pretty chill, Tommy takes charge of the conversation this time. Talking about the latest drama at the tower, living his best life. Tubbo laughs and adds a couple of words in, but it’s clear that he’s a bit drained.

Tommy pauses.

He can feel eyes on him.

Turning around, he scans around the street. Before grabbing Tubbo's sleeve. "Someone's watching us."

"What?" Tubbo whispers, he looks over his shoulder, before looking back ahead. "What do you mean?"

"I can feel someone looking at us," Tommy says, grip tight on Tubbo's sleeve. He looks around again, before grabbing his necklace from Techno.

He's not going to smash it but... it's there just in case.

Tubbo freezes. "There's someone on the roof."

Tommy grabs Tubbo's sleeve and starts dragging them in the opposite direction.

"Stay on public streets," Tubbo mutters, "Don't cut down alleyways... I'm gonna call Techno or something—"

"Why would someone follow us?" Tommy hisses.

"I don't know!" Tubbo yells back, he scrambles for his phone before holding it against his ear. It rings a couple of times. "Techno, hey, yeah, yeah, Tommy's fine— we think we're being followed."

"Put him on speaker," Tommy mutters, and Tubbo does that.

"You're being followed?" Techno repeats.

"I think so," Tommy looks over his shoulder, "I need a lift. We can't lead them directly home."

Techno hums, “I need to talk to you, Tommy.” His voice is flat, and Tommy finds his stomach dropping. Okay. Okay. Now *that* is less than ideal. He ignores his panic and looks back over his shoulder.

Let whoever is following them know that they’re following them.

Public streets.

Don’t go home. Tommy knows how to shake someone following them, he’s done it before. But for once in his life... he doesn’t need to, there are people that will help him, and knowing that almost makes him want to cry.

“Where are you?” Techno asks.

“Near Logstedchire Plaza,” Tubbo says. His voice is level and Tommy is glad one of them is calm (at least.) “We’re gonna stop at the sushi place and wait for you or Wilbur.”

Techno makes a noise. “Wilbur’s with Fundy. It’ll probably be Phil and I, if that’s alright?”

“Yeah,” Tubbo says, he looks over his shoulder.

Tommy does too.

He sees the flash of a white hoodie, then he goes to look back at it and it’s gone.

Huh.

Tubbo drags him down the street before they enter the sushi place. Tubbo glances at his phone and his face drops.

Tommy gives him a curious look.

“You good?”

“Yeah, yeah, I was just assigned some end of year assignment,” Tubbo sighs and puts his phone back into his pocket. “Now we just wait for... Philza and The Blade, that’s a fucking odd sentence to be saying.”

Tommy huffs, before looking at the counter. He might as well get some sushi, so that’s exactly what he does. Handing one of the little containers to Tubbo.

It’s pretty shitty sushi, but it’s one of the best that Tommy has ever had. He’s not exactly experienced in the sushi department.

They eat in relative silence.

The door rings as it opens, and Techno is standing there.

He looks a bit out of his element, but less so than Phil if he was here. Techno looks around before spying Tubbo and Tommy.

He shoves his hands back into his pockets before walking over to the table that Tubbo and Tommy are sitting at. “You two alright?”

Tubbo nods, mouth full of sushi. “Think they were following Tommy.”

“Huh?” Tommy says.

“I mean, you’re close to SBI,” Tubbo shrugs, “Easy way to get at them.”

Techno sighs, before glancing around. There’s a camera pointed at them, and an awkward child trying to approach them. It’s almost endearing, Techno murmurs something about regretting being a hero before turning towards the kid.

They look like Elena.

Tommy looks over at the family that the kid wandered over from. Sure enough, there is Elena, the kid from when they went suit shopping. The kid who called Theseus a hero.

Nice!

Tommy tilts his head at her, and Elena’s eyes lighten up. She shuffles off of her seat before running towards Tommy.

“Tommy!” Elena yells, “Tommy! Hi!”

Tubbo snorts, “Got a fan, have ya?”

“Elena,” Tommy grins and she stops in front of their table. “Hey!”

Elena grins even brighter and grabs her sister’s sleeve, tugging on it and she looks over at Tommy. Tommy gives a small wave.

“She’s deaf,” Elena explains. “But that’s okay, it means we can talk about people without them knowing.”

Tommy snorts, *“Everyone here knows sign language, sorry.”*

Elena’s sister’s eyes go wide for a moment. She looks back at Techno excitedly. *“Hi! I’m Elizabeth.”*

“I’m Techno,” Techno signs back easily. *“I haven’t used sign in a while, you’ll have to forgive me.”*

Elizabeth looks at Elena, then Tommy and smiles so wide that it almost hurts Tommy to look at. But he finds himself smiling too.

“That’s alright!” Elizabeth signs, *“I don’t really know what to say,”* she laughs awkwardly and Techno laughs too.

Elena is grinning, pulling on Tommy’s sleeve and then looking back at her sister. It is so endearing it’s ridiculous.

“Nice to meet you,” Techno signs. *“You’re one of the nicer fans.”*

Elizabeth laughs, *“Thank you!”*

Techno glances at the door, *“Well I gotta go, deliver these children.”*

Elizabeth nods and waves.

Tommy waves at Elena before following Techno, as Tubbo walks behind the two of them. He doesn’t say or do much, instead glancing at his phone every couple of seconds and inhaling sharply.

“You okay?” Tommy asks.

“Yeah, fucking English assignment— semi colons. Fucking pricks, I hate ‘em.”

“I am aware.”

“Everyone thinks they’re used for different things! I have yet to find two people who agree. I watched Purp and Ranboo argue for an hour. An *hour* over nothing, and neither of them agreed. Just let me use a comma, or rephrase the sentence.”

Techno looks at them, “Use them to connect two independent clauses... surely.”

“That’s what Ranboo said and they argued for an hour!”

“A semicolon is when you need a colon and a comma at the same time. So you use a semicolon so you look like you know how to write.”

Techno’s silent for a moment, apparently pondering this idea. “Yeah that works.”

“I hate English,” Tubbo mutters, “The worst.”

“Don’t you speak five languages?”

“And I can barely write or read in any of them,” Tubbo mutters, walking out onto the street. “Just... words y’know.”

“Ah. Words,” Techno says with a nod. “Gotta love ‘em.”

Tubbo just gives him a deadpan stare. “What?”

“What?” Techno mutters, “I wanted to be an English major before I realised that the hero program took all of my potential dreams and crushed them like a bug.”

“Welp!” Tubbo claps his hands together, “Let’s go! Corrupt systems, gotta love ‘em. Let’s get a bunch of children who legally can not make a decision for themselves and train them to be the most dangerous individuals in L’Manberg. And then we’ll act shocked when they finally act out.”

Techno snorts, “Bit too real, Tubbo.”

Tubbo rolls his eyes, and follows after Techno.

In front of them is a blue ute. Phil’s sitting in the front, there’s... something in the tray. But there’s a cover over it. Tommy can however see what looks like the bottom of the axe poking out the side of the tray

Tubbo and Tommy exchange a glance.

They both clamber into the back of the car and Techno sits around in the passenger side.

“What’s with the stuff?”

“Weapons,” Phil says absent-mindedly.

“You have... that many weapons, in the back of your ute?”

“And some superhero gear,” Phil adds absentmindedly, “Are you two alright?”

“Yeah,” Tubbo says, looking back down at his phone.

Tommy nods, looking out the window.

Standing on the side of the road, is Punz.

Tommy knows this by the white hoodie and the blond hair.

Tommy presses his hands against the window.

For a moment they stare at each other, and Phil turns the corner.

“Tommy?” Techno asks, looking at Tommy through the rear-view mirror.

“Why was—” Tommy shakes his head before sitting back in his seat. “That doesn’t—” he shakes his head again and gives Techno a smile. “Just thought I saw someone from my high school class.”

It’s an easy lie, and Tommy hates how easily he does so.

“I thought you did high school online?” Phil asks, glancing in the rear-view mirror before turning.

“Yeah,” Tommy mutters. “I still would see my classmates, video calls and stuff.”

“Huh,” Techno says in a tone which screams ‘I do not believe you, you little lying shit.’ And Tommy simply decides to ignore it. Like any sane person would do.

The car is silent for a moment.

Tommy takes a chance to look at just how tired Phil looks, it looks like he is a man firmly on auto-pilot mode. Tommy struggles to say anything for a moment, before sighing and leaning forwards in his seat.

“Phil, you okay?”

Phil’s eyes flicker to the rear-view mirror then back onto the road. “Yeah. Just been a bit stressed these past couple of days mate. Haven’t had a coffee in... too long, in my humble opinion.”

“Fundy,” Techno says, and that somehow explains everything. “He’s got peritonitis—”

“Can we not,” Tubbo says, eyes still glued on his phone. “Please. Fundy’s situation is government protected information at the moment and you shouldn’t be telling Tommy, or me any of it. I get telling Tommy, but don’t tell me.”

Techno and Phil exchange a glance.

“Tubbo, stop being a dick.”

“They’re breaking policy. It states that they’re not allowed to discuss medical matters about other heroes to anyone outside of the program.” Tubbo says completely evenly.

“You alright, mate?” Phil asks.

“Fine.” Tubbo says through gritted teeth. “I just don’t like hearing about gunshot wounds, it makes me feel all wrong. Not good experiences.”

Tommy pulls a face.

Right, that’s new.

Phil nods sympathetically and the car falls into an easy silence.

Tommy looks out the window, Techno keeps glancing at him and he hates it just a little bit.

Eventually they end up at the apartment (with some directions from Tommy.)

And Phil... to his credit tries not to show his distaste. He looks at the apartment and raises an eyebrow, then back at Tommy.

“The stair’s broken.”

“Yeah, been like that for a while,” Tommy shrugs, “Ranboo fell through it.”

“He fuckin’ what?” Tubbo says, “You didn’t tell me this.”

“Ah. Ha. Yeah, um—”

Tubbo glares, “Did he hurt himself?”

“No...” Tommy lies, “Okay that might be the reason his ankle can do that clicking thing. But it was fine.”

“And you didn’t tell me?”

“Nope.”

Tubbo sighs, and opens the car door. He pauses to look at Phil. “Thanks for the lift.”

“No problem,” Phil says and Tommy knows he means it. “If you need anything from me, let me know.”

Tubbo nods before getting out of the car.

Techno also moves to get out.

Phil pulls a face. “Mate?”

“I gotta talk to Tommy about...”

“The Swinter gift,” Tommy lies easily. Phil nods, and they both get out of the car.

Tubbo climbs up the stairs back to their house. Somehow he got headphones from somewhere and is currently struggling to put them on, muttering something under his breath.

Techno sighs, before walking away from their apartment. “Come on,” he says and Tommy follows after him.

They walk for a bit, in silence. Techno is clearly thinking and Tommy doesn't want to interrupt... that. Techno already doesn't have many thoughts, Tommy doesn't want to intrude on them by speaking.

Then he gets bored.

"So... what are we talking about?"

"You tell me," Techno says, head still looking where he's walking and hands in his pockets.

Ah okay. This is a Tommy's Parents™ moment. Except it's from Techno and therefore Tommy has no clue how to feel about it. He's learnt from his parents it's normally better to stay quiet.

Tommy stays silent.

"Tommy?" Techno says, glancing at him. "Anything happen at the gala?"

"Okay, you clearly know what we're talking about. Stop making me overthink everything and just tell me."

"Fundy told me about what you did at the gala," Techno stops in his tracks to look at Tommy. "You were lucky Wilbur wasn't in the room."

"Oh," Tommy looks down at his feet. "Huh."

"What the fuck, Tommy?" Techno says. "Do you know how reckless that is?"

"I jammed the gun, nothing was going to happen."

“What if your powers failed?” Techno says through gritted teeth, “What if they had pulled the trigger? Then what, Tommy?”

“I knew it worked.”

Techno makes a noise out of pure frustration and looks at Tommy. There’s something heavy in his eyes, something almost understanding. There’s also just... pure annoyance.

“You’re not immortal, Tommy,” Techno says, gesturing around them, “One day you’re going to go too far or rely on your already faulty abilities and then what? Then you’re dead? And we’re left with a corpse?”

“I don’t care!” Tommy yells, “Okay? I know I’m not immortal, I know that one day my powers will fail when I need them the most. I know all of this, I’m not a stupid teenager who thinks he’s above death. I know death, Techno. I’ve almost died several times, it isn’t a new concept to me. I’ve seen people overdose on the streets and watched them die.”

Techno doesn’t say anything.

Somehow that’s exactly what Tommy needs.

“Fundy was in danger! I wasn’t just going to run off and let him die, not like I did with you ___”

“Tommy, if this is about the warehouse—” Techno starts.

“Everything’s about the warehouse!” Tommy yells.

Silence.

For a long moment the both of them are silent, Techno opens his mouth in shock and Tommy's hands are shaking. He's shaking in general, Tommy struggles to get his thoughts together again.

"I can not let anything like that happen ever again!" Tommy yells, "Okay? I fucked up, I fucked up so bad and your life is ruined because of it! I'm not going to let myself do that to anyone else, Fundy has friends and Wilbur and you guys and— I wasn't going to let anything happen to him. I wasn't going to run away and let him handle it... not like I did with you."

"Tommy..." Techno whispers, "I'm not mad at you for that. I haven't been for a long time."

"Well I am!" Tommy yells again, his eyes are filled with tears that are falling. "I am so fucking mad at myself, every day. Because I'm supposed to be better than that, I am better than that now."

"Tommy," Techno says again, his voice filled with care. "We talked about this— you're a kid."

"Am I?" Tommy shoots back. "Am I really, Techno? I haven't been a kid since I was six and my parents decided it was a good idea to— nevermind."

Techno takes a small step forwards, and Tommy doesn't move away from it. Instead he stands his ground. He at Techno, scowling slightly. Techno doesn't say anything for a long moment.

"Can I give you a hug?"

Tommy just looks at him, "You've gone all soft."

Techno shrugs.

“Tommy... you’re allowed to be selfish. You don’t have to fight every fight, you’re allowed to run away. You’re allowed to be scared, you’re allowed to be a kid.”

Tommy puts his hands in his hoodie pocket. (Courtesy of the Philza hoodie.) And shrugs. “I’m not scared.” There’s a slight waver to his voice and they both know it.

Techno just looks... so incredibly sad.

“I wasn’t scared,” Tommy says. “When I jammed the gun, really, I wasn’t—I just wanted to make sure Fundy and I got out alive. Really. I wasn’t, I don’t get scared easily.”

“Tommy...”

“Really!” Tommy smiles, “I’m fine. Bit freaked out by Fundy almost dying, but I’m fine. Still a bit fucked up from the warehouse, but I’m fine.”

“You’re not fine, Tommy,” Techno says. “You’re allowed to not be fine, you’re allowed to be struggling.”

Tommy takes a step away from Techno. “I’m fine, really. Like... I’m doing well, I’m not fighting with my friends. I’m sleeping pretty well.”

“You’re scaring Purpled,” Techno says.

The fucker snitched to Techno!

Just because Techno is an authority figure, and Tommy is statistically more likely to listen to authority figures than Purpled. Tommy clenches his jaw, and decides he’s going to fucking kill Purpled when he gets home.

“Fuckin’ snitch.”

“You’re being reckless, you’ll get yourself killed.”

“I’m making sure my friends are safe. I know what I’m doing.”

“No... no you don’t,” Techno mutters, looking away and sighing. “Tommy. You’re scaring one of your best friends. I’m scared too, you don’t need to make it up for the warehouse. Okay? You need to stay alive, more than you need to be a good person.”

Tommy opens his mouth.

“Let me speak, then you can reply. You’re allowed to be selfish, you have had ridiculously high standards pushed on you for a long time. So your scale of fuck ups is so much bigger than other people’s your age. Someone your age might... get drunk and dance embarrassingly. Your fuck ups are bigger because you’re expected to act like an adult and you just don’t have that life experience yet.”

“You’ve fuckin’ thought about this.”

“And then you blame yourself when you don’t act like an adult in these situations. You acted like a kid in the warehouse, one that wanted to go home. And now you’re beating yourself up over it, and I’m sorry I didn’t see this sooner.”

Tommy glares at him, “I’m fine,” he takes a couple of steps and pushes past Techno.

Surprisingly, Techno let’s him go back towards the apartment.

“Tommy?” Techno says.

Tommy turns around and scowls. “What?”

“I care about you,” Techno says easily. Tommy hates how easily he said it. He said it like another fact of life, like the sky being blue, or Wilbur liking to kick vigilantes off of roofs. “Alright? Just... think about it.”

“I won’t,” Tommy snaps back. Before flipping off Techno and walking off.

It’s too early to deal with this shit.

Who cares if it’s like... almost 7pm.

He’s fine.

Really. He’s fine.

Something inside him calls him a liar.

Tommy ignores it.

He has stuff to do anyway.

HI GUYS!!!!!! Today's meme was also created by the beloved Pixel (EVERYONE SAY THANK YOU PIXEL)



Chapter Summary:

Important things that happen in this chapter:

- Tubbo goes to murder Schlatt. He does not, and they have some wholesome moments. Schlatt reveals that he knows Tommy is Theseus and he picked up the phone Tommy dropped at the gala.
- Schlatt himself does not have any involvement with fighting rings. However Tubbo takes the server's files and promises to look through it for any in to the underground fighting ring world
- They get followed
- Techno & Phil pick them up and then Techno and Tommy have a little chat about the gala and specifically Tommy being reckless, (Fundy snitched.)
- To be fair, the talk makes Tommy start thinking. And he goes "no <3"

WE HAVE MORE ART! THANK YOU ANYONE WHO DID
ART/TIKTOKS/WHATEVER I LOVE YOU <333 /p

THIS COOL [DESIGN OF TOMMY](#) BY HIGHWAY GREMLIN ON THE DISCORD
SERVER, THANK YOU!!!

[Accurate Depiction of Chapter 24](#), by [Ripple](#)

THIS FUCKING AMAZING [TECHNOBLADE DRAWING](#) BY STARRY, THANK
YOU! I could stare at it forever.

[Tommy thinking about egg salad sandwiches](#), by the beloved Pistol, which is so fucking
funny

[TINA Techno](#) doodles, drawn by Rae

[Theseus](#) and [Tommy](#) both drawn by Soda

[FLOOF](#) DRAWN BY [CAIT](#)

[Tommy](#) by Marina, thank you!

[Floof](#) drawn by Slime

[THIS SUPER COOL POSTER](#) BY WIL, WITH PURPLED AND TOMMY

[Logo](#) by [Fig!](#)

[Puffy as a Facebook Mum](#) drawn by Niki, I love it!

[Chapter 14 Comic](#) by [Al](#)

Thank you everyone for reading! I'll be taking a bit of time off (probably) due to another
writing thing I gotta do, and the fact I just wanna chill and play the Sims 4 for like seven
hours straight. See ya!

In Which Vanilla Bean Ice Cream Reigns Supreme

Chapter Summary

you know how tina!tubbo doesn't have face scars...

ahahahahahaaa yeah.

Edit From the Future:

this chapter heavily features dream, or tinaaos!dream, he has not been written out (that might come in the future) but cc!dream is someone i personally no longer want to have a character even SLIGHTLY based off of him in a sympathetic light. because fuck that guy. feel free to skip forwards to this for the Tubbo content:

Tommy crosses his arms. "I'm gonna go..." Tommy says slowly. "You'll be alright?"

Chapter Notes

Warnings: descriptions of burns, fireworks & injuries, someone almost gets hit by a car (they don't however), mentions and descriptions of knives and guns. Depictions of a panic attack and fear of heights

Some fun details for anyone to look back on if they want to:

- Take notice of when Tommy says Spectre instead of Wilbur.
- When Tommy's lying, people may just be lying straight back at him.
- Tubbo, straight up just Tubbo. Look at some of his hesitation and dialogue lines if you wanna (especially from previous chapters)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy's on patrol.

Well patrol seems like a nice word for it, he's sitting on top of a roof eating a burrito. It's a good burrito too. Going into the burrito place and trying to order as Theseus was a task to say the least.

People were taking photos of him and Tommy had to write down what he wanted.

But the burrito is probably worth it.

Sure the public now have actual confirmed images of him, his rough height and build and hair colour.

But this burrito is really good.

So he's really okay with this.

Tubbo's gonna yell at him, but again, the burrito man.

His mental health is hanging on by a burrito.

Purpled laughs next to him, as Tommy explains this concept.

"Please get therapy," Purpled bites into his own burrito. "These burritos really aren't that good. You also should've let me order them."

"You order them wrong."

Purpled just gives him a look.

Tommy responds by focusing on his god given burrito.

“I do not, you don’t need that much meat.”

“I do so,” Tommy says. Although he has half a burrito in his mouth so it sounds a bit more like a random jumble of letters. Still, Purpled manages to decipher it and he rolls his eyes. “You put on too much cheese.”

“You don’t put on enough cheese.”

“I do so!” Tommy says, “I want some other shit rather than cheese on there. I don’t pay—”

“I paid!”

“I don’t carry money on patrol!”

“Well you should, what if you want a burrito? You can’t just be an asshole and use your fame to get a burrito for free.”

“I totally could.”

Purpled rolls his eyes. He puts his gun that was just on the ground back into his thigh holster.

“You’re actually bad,” Purpled says into his burrito. “Trash. Dogwater.”

“None of those words are in the bible.”

“I hate you—”

“*Sorry boys,*” that’s Tubbo’s voice chiming in through the ear pieces and Tommy jumps. He almost drops his burrito, which he quickly starts shoving into his mouth. “*We have an ongoing robbery at the corner store on... the intersection of Aspen Street and Franklin Street. I’d say we need to fix that.*”

Purpled touches his finger to the ear piece. “On it... what’s your codename?”

“*Bee!*” A voice says from far away and Tommy knows that’s Ranboo because he laughs.

“On it, Bee, this is Purpled, over and out.”

“*That’s not how—*”

“Theseus, over and out.”

“*Why did we decide to do this?*” Tubbo mutters, slightly distorted. “*We don’t even need codenames.*”

“It’s funny,” Tommy argues, hopping over a building and stumbling on his feet. He decides to ignore Purpled snickering and keeps running. “Can Ranboo be Boo, I think that’s objectively hilarious—”

“*Problem arising,*” Tubbo says and Tommy shuts himself up. “*If the Aurelian updates Twitter account is correct and it doesn’t tend to be, that she’s out on patrol tonight and she is currently dealing with an Elysium attack.*”

“Where?” Purpled says. Tommy grabs onto Purpled and throws both of them across to another building. They both land on their feet with little issue and keep running. “Tubbo, I need a location.”

“Uh... I think on the edge of Kinoko and Logsted. Near... that hospital?”

Purpled gives Tommy a nod, before launching himself off the side of a building.

“Dramatic shit,” Tommy mutters. “You got this Tubbo?”

“I got this,” Tubbo says, “Ranboo, I’m gonna need you to be checking for updates on the Elysium situation... fuck it’s been a hot second since I’ve had to multi-task like this. Okay, you’re gonna go three buildings down to your left.”

“Me?” Purpled says.

“Yeah you, shit head. Tommy knows where he’s going.”

Tommy does know where he’s going, and runs to get there.

The trip there is pretty short and he eventually lands down on the ground. Purpled and Tubbo are arguing into his ear, and Tommy makes the wise decision to mute the both of them.

He takes a few steps forwards.

It’s a pretty small corner store, pretty simple at that too. With bricks climbing up it and a huge sign that says what it is. It’s built into the side of an apartment block, the owner probably doesn’t live nearby.

The glass for the storefront is broken and Tommy can hear shuffling around in the store.

He steps through the broken window.

The shuffling stops.

Tommy reaches for where he knows the light switch is. He's been to this grocery store a couple of times, and knows the light switch is at the furthest window.

He flicks it on.

Standing at the end of one of the aisles is a man with a shopping trolley. It's filled with just... normal items, bread, milk, butter, there's some vegetables in there too. And Tommy stares for a long moment.

The person stands there too.

They had brown shaggy hair and a beanie that was looking a bit worse for wear. They look up at Tommy, and Tommy looks back at them.

"Hello," the man says. He continues to push his shopping trolley and Tommy follows him down the aisle. "Theseus, I presume?"

Tommy nods.

The man nods and walks down the aisle a bit more, he scoops something off of the shelf and puts it into his trolley. Tommy watches him, keeping a bit of distance just in case. It's rather relaxing, if Tommy's being honest.

They walk in silence, as the trolley gets more and more filled.

Tommy's... confused, to say the least. He walks behind the man. The man doesn't seem too offended that Tommy's following him, he's just sorta... walking without saying anything. Although holding a conversation with Theseus is difficult if you don't know sign language.

The light flickers and Tommy's heart leaps in his chest. Sparks dance to his fingertips and the man turns around slowly. Still holding the trolley.

"Pay day's next week," the man says.

And just like that— Tommy understands.

He nods.

The man sighs, "And... it's not just me anymore y'know. My kid needs to eat."

Tommy hates that he understands. He glances at the shopping trolley again, it's just filled with essentials. Cheap things that can last a while, things that can be the difference between knowing your next meal and not.

Rice, pasta, some bread, a couple of veggies but not many.

Huh.

Tommy picks up a notebook from his left, and a pen too.

'Stealing is still a crime' he writes.

The man nods slowly, “I know. I’m just glad it’s you, not a hero.”

Tommy blinks at him a few times, because what else is he supposed to do? This is clearly someone who needs the food, he has someone else depended on him. Stealing *is* a crime, but will this store really miss the extra money?

It’s a chain store anyway. Not like the multi-billion dollar company will miss what... a hundred dollars?

What would Wilbur do?

Wait no— Wilbur would arrest the man with little hesitation, maybe he’d feel bad about it, but it would get his arrest score higher. Cement his place more at the number four— well maybe three at this point, hero.

Techno would... probably not even bother with dealing with something as small as this. Or if he did, he’d probably arrest the man. Or... maybe tell him to get rid of some of the stuff, Tommy doesn’t know.

Really... he doesn’t know what the other two would do.

Okay. What will *he* do?

He’s not Wilbur or Techno, he’s Tommy. Tommy who knows exactly why all those items were chosen, Tommy who has wished that someone let him go when he had to steal. Tommy who’s born and raised in Logstedchire and proud of it.

This is his decision, no one’s here to watch.

Tommy stares at the man, before looking at the shelves. He picks up a bag of dry pasta and throws it into the cart.

The man looks at him with wide and shocked eyes.

Tommy smiles underneath his mask and steps to the side. He holds out his arm, giving the man a clear direction.

“Thank you,” the man says.

They both know he means it.

“You’re what those people in the tower wished they were.”

And they both know he means that too.

Tommy reaches into his pocket, there’s some spare change from their burritos. It’s... ten dollars or so, but it’s something that might make a world of difference between making rent and being kicked out of your home.

He holds the money out in his hand.

The man shakes his head, “I can’t—”

Tommy doesn’t need it. He hasn’t needed it for a while. He’s paid rent for the next... couple of weeks already, his fridge is full and they have enough money to go out for dinner every now and again.

He doesn’t need it.

This man clearly does.

“You earned it.”

It's Purpled's money, so *he* didn't earn it. It also isn't his to give away, but Purpled isn't exactly broke anymore. He's never really been broke.

Tommy still holds the money out. “I don't need it,” he whispers. “You do.”

Rightfully so, the man's eyes go wider at Tommy's voice. Which... is completely fair. Theseus doesn't speak, but Tommy needs to get his point across.

There's some odd honour among people from Logstedchire, some loyalty that Tommy will never put his finger on. This man isn't going to tell anyone about what happened, and Tommy isn't going to tell anyone either.

Slowly the man takes the ten dollar note from Tommy.

“Thank you,” he says again.

Tommy gives a two finger salute, before darting back out of the broken window and propelling himself up onto a roof.

He lands on both feet and sighs gently.

Then he activates his ear piece again.

“Tommy!”

“Yeah?” Tommy says, already running across the roofs, he has a pretty good idea what’s happening based on the franticness in Tubbo’s voice. He throws himself across one of the gaps and rolls, distributing the weight— Deo taught him that—

“Purpled and Aurelian need help right now— Elysium have stepped up their game.”

“What can I expect?” Tommy turns and runs towards the hospital on the edge of the district.
“Guns, swords?”

“They’re just destroying shit,” Tubbo explains, *“Guns and various other weapons. Purpled, I need an update.”*

Purpled swears from across the line and Tommy hears an oddly familiar noise— the noise of a chair being used to hit someone repeatedly. *“Guns. Twelve down. Thirty people in total.”*

Tommy runs a little faster. Jumping over... fucking hell what is that, and stumbling forwards.

In the distance he can see smoke.

Yup, that’s where he’s going then.

He propels himself forwards, red energy guiding him and moving him most the way across some buildings. He runs even faster, his heart is in his throat, and he’s tired— but Purpled is probably getting his ass handed to him.

Eventually he reaches the hospital area.

He watches as Aurelian fights. She spins around, grabbing someone by the arm and throwing them. They land on the ground with a thump and Tommy resists the urge to congratulate her, because that form was really nice—

Then Aurelian is thrown back onto the road. She skids across the road.

Right into the path of an oncoming car.

Tommy throws himself off the roof.

Wilbur would be happy with that.

He twists in the air, before throwing both of his hands out in front of him and stopping himself *just* before he hits the ground. He lands on the road, his ankle makes a noise at that.

The car is approaching Aurelian and quickly—

He grabs Aurelian by the arms and drags her backwards.

They both fall onto the road and the car zooms past.

He can feel the heat radiating off the car as it drives past, and the air coming off of it ruffles his hair and his hood which he fights to keep on. He looks at Aurelian, who just sits there for a moment.

Aurelian gets to her feet and runs back into the fight.

Why do no vigilantes have any self preservation—

Okay he might be a hypocrite.

He also throws himself into the fight, beside Aurelian.

He blocks someone trying to punch him, before throwing them across the pavement with his powers. There he shifts their density so they're stuck to the floor.

Someone goes to grab Aurelian, and she just holds her hand out. They look at her with wide eyes, before they start shaking. Aurelian turns around to the next person and does the same thing.

Holy shit. Aurelian is so cool. And for what? Tommy can't even be mad about it.

He's busy being wrapped up in how cool Aurelian is, so he doesn't notice the person trying to clobber him in the face. They manage to get a good knock too, because Tommy stumbles back holding his forehead.

Ow!

Aurelian spins around, before roundhouse kicking Tommy's attacker in the face.

She's so cool. Tommy should work with her more—

Tommy throws out his arm and someone falls to the ground, Tommy can deal with that. He turns around to find a gun pointed at his chest.

Okay. Rude.

He doesn't need this sort of negativity—

Yanking the gun out of their hands, Tommy holds it before looking at Aurelian helplessly.

She sighs and grabs the gun from him. Before dropping it on the ground and crushing it with her foot.

He doesn't quite have the time to unpack that— crushing guns is really fucking difficult.

Then pain bursts through Tommy's back, and he whirls around to realise that someone just fucking hit him with a metal pole.

Tommy opens his mouth in what is pure offence before punching them in the face.

It's a bit violent, but now Tommy's back hurts, and he's gonna probably have a fucking epic bruise there tomorrow.

Then... everyone fighting them is gone, either they've run away or are on the floor freaking out. (Courtesy of Aurelian). Or pinned to the ground because their density is too much to get up (that one's Tommy.)

Someone yells out, and Tommy looks up.

On top of a building is Purpled, waving his arms. "Spectre's here!" Purpled screams, voice distorted by his voice modulator. "Catch me!"

"Fuck," Aurelian says, voice also distorted from the voice modulator.

Purpled jumps off the building and Tommy throws out his hands, red energy surrounds Purpled and he lands on the ground, running over to Tommy and grabbing him.

“We gotta go before Spectre kicks you off a roof again!”

Tommy agrees with this statement!

“Follow me,” Aurelian says, and she runs down an alley.

Tommy looks at Purpled, then they both run after her down the alley. It’s... a dodgy alley, but Tommy knows that Wilbur will not want to go down this alley. There’s a dog in the alleyway who looks at them—

Aurelian grabs one of the bins before dragging it under a fire escape. She steps up onto the bin before pulling herself up onto the fire escape.

After a moment of hesitation Purpled pulls himself up onto the fire escape. And Aurelian helps drag him through.

Tommy steps up onto the bin.

A shadow is casted across the alley and Tommy sighs under his breath, before slowly turning around.

Spectre.

Fan-fucking-tastic. This would make this day *so* much better, and was exactly what Tommy needs right now.

“Go, go, go!” Purpled yells, he holds out his hand and Tommy grabs it.

Aurelian and Purpled haul him up onto the fire escape, and Tommy knocks down the bin at the bottom.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck,” Purpled says.

They start running up the stairs.

“Bee, Bee,” Purpled says, apparently turning his ear piece back on. “We have Aurelian, Theseus and myself. Spectre is on our tail, we need somewhere to go.”

They reach the top of the fire escape.

And Spectre gets onto the fire escape.

Tommy grabs both Aurelian and Purpled. He takes a deep breath, before using his powers to propel them all up.

Well... he propels himself up, Aurelian and Purpled are just along for the ride.

Purpled screeches and they land on the roof.

“Go, go, go!” Aurelian yells.

So they start going.

Then Spectre pops up out of the ground.

Purpled yells again, before pulling out his gun.

“Hey, hey, hey,” Wilbur says as he takes a step back. “Okay. So hear me out—”

“Nope!” Aurelian says, and she reaches forwards.

Wilbur phases through her hand.

“Rude,” Wilbur sighs and does not go corporal, he just looks slightly bored. “Okay— I can not believe I’m saying this. If you tell me what you know about Elysium, I will let you go.”

“You really think you can take all of us?” Purpled laughs, “Theseus can beat you by himself.”

Wilbur’s eyes land on Tommy.

Tommy forgets how to breathe.

Spectre’s hands clench into fists. And Tommy can’t think of anything apart from the feeling of falling— and Wilbur’s voice being cold, and so unlike Wilbur.

While, yes, Tommy could probably beat Spectre in a fight. That doesn’t save him from his heart from jumping into his throat and beating so loud he can barely hear anything else.

Oh god. Oh fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck—

“Look, Elysium is a huge risk and while all of you might end up going rogue, they are currently more rogue than the three of you

He’s scared.

Tommy is... fucking terrified of Wilbur— Spectre, they seem like two different people in his head.

He can’t breathe— fuck he can’t breathe.

“Theseus,” Wilbur says.

Tommy can’t even react, he just doesn’t say anything. Hands glued to his side, mind running a million miles an hour.

Is Wilbur going to find out— fuck he can’t find out, because then everything’s fucked up for Tommy. Is Wilbur going to hurt him again? Because Tommy’s not sure how much more of getting hurt by people he cares about he can take—

Tommy looks at Purpled. Purpled’s eyes are laser focused on Spectre.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

“They want justice,” Aurelian says first. “For Logstedchire... they want the hero's attention, and it looks like they’re getting it.”

Purpled looks at Spectre, before moving slightly so he’s standing just in front of Tommy. Not a lot either, just enough that *if* Spectre tried anything then Purpled could do something.

Tommy opens his mouth and closes it again, he tries to think— or to do anything.

“Okay,” Spectre says, he takes a few more steps back. “Anything else?”

“They’re after you,” Purpled says, “The heroes, I reckon you know it— and lots of them are hybrids. That’s all I know.”

Spectre nods, “Okay.” He says.

Then he phases through the ground, and he’s gone.

Tommy finally finds himself breathing again. His breathing is uneven and shaking all over the place, something that he hates just a little bit. But he’s breathing, Purpled looks at him, and while Tommy can’t see his eyes, he can imagine the concern on his features.

“Is he okay?” Aurelian asks.

“I need you to leave,” Purpled says, his voice frighteningly calm.

Aurelian nods, and Tommy watches her dart across buildings until she’s well out of ear’s reach.

Purpled turns to Tommy, putting both hands on Tommy’s shoulder. “Tommy?”

“Wil’s— not dangerous. He won’t hurt me? Right? He won’t—”

Purpled doesn’t say anything and sits down in front of Tommy. Also dragging Tommy to the ground with him. “I don’t know Tommy.”

“He won’t— he won’t hurt me,” Tommy says again. “Right he’s not gonna—”

“I don’t know Tommy, I really don’t know.” Purpled says.

“I don’t— I’m sick of being scared,” Tommy looks up at Purpled.

They make eye contact for a moment and Purpled looks away. “I know.” Purpled says through gritted teeth.

“When does it stop?” Tommy says, “When do I finally stop being scared? Or is it like this forever?”

“I don’t know, Tommy,” Purpled says, and he sounds like he’s on the verge of tears. “I really don’t know.”

And they go home.

Tommy can’t remember a lot about the trip home. Only that Purpled basically dragged him half the way, and then shoved him through the window. Purpled and Tubbo afterwards had talked in low tones, and Ranboo looked generally concerned whenever he looked at Tommy.

Between all of that it’s not surprising Tommy sleeps like shit..

Everything in the apartment is just... wrong.

Purpled’s bed seems to squeak at the slightest of noises, cars zoom past just as he tries to get some sleep

One of the worst nights of sleep he's had in a while. He'll be the first to admit it.

Tommy needs coffee.

He stumbles into work, realising he probably looks terrible. There's a bruise that he can only try to cover up with hair a little. It's not very pretty either, all purple and gross looking. He pulls up his sleeves too.

Glancing in the window of the tower he screws up his face. Wow. He really does look terrible.

"Hey, Tommy."

"Hi Kristin," Tommy mumbles, he shows his pass up to one of the guards by the door before walking up to the front desk.

"You look exhausted."

Tommy yawns. "Yeah... stayed up watching Bird Box."

Kristin just blinks at him. "Don't tell me you stayed up because you were creeped out by that?"

"What? No, we just got invested in the movie. We started it late too."

A complete and utter lie.

He's getting pretty good at that.

He ignores the ache in his chest at that.

Huh.

“Tommy?” Someone says.

Tommy looks up, snapped out of... whatever he was thinking about. What was he thinking about?

It's Techno.

He looks concerned.

And Tommy... does the most responsible thing. Something that every single emotionally stable person in the country would do.

He runs up to his office and closes the door.

Great! This is great, fantastic.

He sighs and looks across his room.

Wilbur is there.

Tommy yelps, before picking up his pen holder and lobbing it at Wilbur's head.

It hits with a pretty satisfying noise.

Wilbur just looks offended.

Hey Floof is also here.

Floof looks up at Tommy, and kindly gets off the bean bag that he's apparently made home.

There is also a whiteboard in his office, a whiteboard that was very clearly not there before. On the aforementioned whiteboard there are papers and... a building diagram and a photo of Quackity's face.

It is far too early for this.

Tommy sits down at his desk.

It's nine in the morning,

He yawns and Wilbur gives him a look.

"Tommy," he says offendedly.

Tommy yawns again before looking back at Wilbur.

Floof is roaming around the bottom of Tommy's chair, trying to get up onto the desk. But Tommy can not be bothered to pick him up. Floof has made his distaste clear with his barking and yaps.

“So the plan is,” Wilbur keeps explaining. “We corner Quackity—”

“Why?”

Wilbur turns around from the whiteboard he rolled into Tommy’s office and gives him a look. “I literally just— Quackity’s been worrying me, he keeps running off and I am pretty sure he was crying in the bathroom yesterday.”

“Which bathroom?”

“Uh... the ones on the Dream Team floor.”

Tommy nods, “Good crying bathrooms—”

“Eh, the lower floors are better. No one works there.”

“Huh,” Tommy hums.

Floof barks at him, and Tommy sighs, picking up Floof and sitting him on the desk. He walks around in a circle, trying to get comfortable before resting his head on one of his paws and closing his eyes.

Mans could’ve napped on the floor, but okay then.

“So what we do is we corner him.” Wilbur points to a badly drawn version of Quackity. With the beanie and two blobs coming out of his back. Tommy thinks they’re supposed to be wings. “Then we say we’re worried about him, and hopefully he cracks.”

Tommy gives him a look. “Let me get this straight, you brought in a whiteboard and did a whole introduction speech to tell me that?”

“Yes. Yes I did.”

“Why... why are you like this?” Tommy asks.

Wilbur shrugs, “Probably trauma, denial— I could go on. Being ignored by Techno.”

“Rude.”

Wilbur groans and launches himself into the beanbag in the corner. Ah. That was worth stealing from someone else’s office. Considering how many people hang out in his office.

“He’s been doing *something*, I just hear him typing all day. I am pretty sure he’s living in Sam’s lab.”

“Huh?”

“Dunno,” Wilbur shrugs, “He’s doing some tech thing I guess. Or been— trying to, I dunno how well that’s goin’ for him. He’s not a tech person, in case you could not tell.”

Tommy shrugs, and looks back at the whiteboard. “Let me get this right— we’re just gonna ask Quackity if everything’s alright?”

“No, *I* am, because we’re actually friends.”

“I’m friends with Quackity.”

“That’s like saying you’re friends with Dream.”

“Am so, we talked about black forest cake.”

“Ew,” Wilbur screws up his nose.

“You eat fried rice with your bare hands, shut the fuck up—”

“You saw that?”

“Of course I did! How could I not—”

There’s a knock at the door.

The door is open for sure, but Dream is standing in the doorway. He doesn’t have his hero mask on, just one that covers the lower half of his face. He looks at Wilbur then Tommy.

“Tommy? Are you busy?” Dream asks.

“Nope.”

“Yup.” Wilbur says at the same time.

Tommy looks at Wilbur, then back at Dream, “What’s up?”

Dream sighs slightly, “I just do not want to be at the tower right now, and realised that everyone likes you a good amount. The higher ups don’t really but they’ll survive, so if we say we’re... I dunno talking about PR stuff, I can leave.”

Wilbur gives Dream a look, there’s a bit of concern there too. “What did you do?”

Dream shuffles on his feet, “George didn’t capture any vigilantes last night.”

“Glitch was out on patrol?” Tommy squawks.

Wilbur nods, “Yeah? Elysium attack, most of the Logstedchire vigilantes handled it.”

Dream glances at Tommy and then nods, “Theseus had his first outing in a while. Worked with Purpled and Aurelian.”

Wilbur groans, “Don’t even get me started— why don’t they fucking know anything about Elysium, I would’ve thought they’d teamed up or something. If Elysium is working in the best interest and Logstedchire.”

“Okay, let’s not talk politics,” Dream says.

Tommy sighs and looks at Floof. Floof gives him a deadpan expression.

This is why Floof is the most valid person in the room.

Floof looks at him, then barks.

Tommy nods.

“What’s the issue?”

“Just gotta get outta the tower until this blows over—” Dream pauses. “I’ll get you ice cream.”

“Deal,” Tommy says standing up.

What can he say? He hasn’t had breakfast, and he really fucking wants some ice cream.

Wilbur looks offended. “You’re leaving me for Dream?”

“Yup!” Tommy grins.

“Rude,” Wilbur says and turns back towards his white board.

Tommy grabs his backpack, putting it back over one shoulder and he runs after Dream who is already halfway towards the elevator. He manages to catch up with Dream, and Dream adjusts the mask on his face.

They step into the elevator and they stand there in silence.

“Why are you in trouble?” Tommy asks.

“I’m the leader of the Dream Team, I’m supposed to take the fall for George and Sapnap’s mistakes.”

“Phil doesn’t do that with SBI.”

Dream glances at Tommy, he scoffs. “Well the higher ups like him way more than me.”

They stand there for a long moment, Tommy opens his mouth then closes it. Trying to figure out what the fuck he’s supposed to say. Normally he’s better at conversation than this... what the fuck is happening in his brain?

Dream shifts from leg to leg.

“What’s the worst word you know?” Tommy asks.

Dream sputters and looks at him, “Excuse me?”

“I’m just a child, I don’t know any bad words. You must teach me, what’s the worst word you know?”

Dream looks straight ahead. “Callipygian.”

“Huh? What does that mean?”

“Can’t tell you.”

They stand there in silence for a bit longer.

“So,” Dream starts.

“I can’t believe you said the worst word you know to a teenager.”

“You’re nineteen, you can handle it.”

“What the fuck does that even mean? Callipygian. How do I use it in a sentence?”

“Don’t use it in a sentence,” Dream retorts.

Okay. Fair enough.

They fall silent for a moment.

“I think you should work in my PR department,” Dream says, swift subject change, Tommy can appreciate it. “I mean... SBI are great— but the Dream Team is better. Less effort, and none of us will kick vigilantes off of roofs.”

Tommy snorts, “Don’t discount yourself yet. I mean... it’s kinda fun working for SBI, there’s always something to do. You have a whole PR team, for SBI it’s really just me at this point. I think they moved the old one out to... Quackity’s department when that whole thing happened.”

“That whole thing?”

“I dunno— very hand wavy,” Tommy tries to remember. “Yeah I think they left me by myself. If they haven’t I’m already managing interviews and merch discussion, but I pushed that off to Marley.”

“Marley?”

“Uhh... Marley from... Sam’s department.”

“Like the hero department or *his* department, the tech department.”

“Tech. She’s alright. It’s amazing the amount of respect I have around here.”

The elevator opens and Dream laughs.

“I mean you did take the number one hero out in one move. You’re sorta a legend in the tower, rightfully so. I mean you noticed this tiny detail—”

“It really wasn’t fuckin’ tiny, P— Daniel would’ve beat me up if my form had been that awful.” Tommy rolls his eyes. He walks past Kristin, and shows up his pass to one of the guards.

Both him and Dream get nodded through, which is always amazing.

Dream and Tommy out in the wide world, what will they do?

A crime perhaps?

The answer is look up where the fuck they can get ice cream in Central L’Manberg. They do that, which is always nice.

“There’s a place like ten minutes away,” Dream mumbles eyes on his phone.

“But Logstedchire has the best ice cream, these people make it by hand!”

“I don’t wanna go to Logstedchire, the subway ride is like thirty minutes.”

“I’ll cancel you.”

“You wouldn’t.”

Tommy raises an eyebrow and opens Twitter.

They end up going to Logstedchire.

Dream doesn’t even complain on the subway ride, and they don’t even just straight up look at their phones. They’re actually communicating and shit.

Tommy snickers into his hand, “I reckon she’s listening to... hard rock.”

“Tommy, she’s literally in ballet gear,” Dream responds, “I reckon she’s listening to... no clue actually.”

Tommy looks around the train. There’s someone sitting in a suit, completely drenched. Tommy points him out to Dream.

Dream slaps his hand over his mouth to stop himself from laughing and somehow that makes Tommy cackle. He covers his mouth with his hands and tries to suppress his laughter.

Not with a lot of success.

“What happened to him?” Tommy whispers through laughs.

Dream wheezes, a bit like a kettle actually—

Tommy throws his head back and laughs.

Then the man looks at them. His expression is murderous to say the least.

“What the fuck are you lookin’ at?” The man snarls.

“You, quite clearly,” Dream says.

Tommy whacks him in the arm, “Don’t get all high and mighty— he will not hesitate to beat you up.”

The man stands up.

Dream raises an eyebrow and adjusts his mask so it’s more around his nose. “Do I like— fix this?”

“I don’t fucking know,” Tommy hisses.

The man walks over to them, holding onto one of the... bar holdy things you’re supposed to hold onto. “What the fuck do you think you’re laughin’ about?”

“You,” Dream says. “Looks like a fish attacked you.”

The man's face darkens.

Tommy puts his hood over his head and tries to sink into the floor. Shockingly enough, it doesn’t work.

“Shut the fuck up,” Tommy mutters, glaring at Dream. “Look I’m really sorry but—”

The man swings at *Tommy*.

Dream catches the man’s arm before he hits Tommy, does something fancy thing Tommy doesn’t keep track of and he’s on the ground.

Tommy glances at Dream.

“The next station is Logstedchire Plaza, change here for Kinoko Routes three and seven. Please mind the gap between the train and the platform edge.”

The announcement says that, and Tommy grabs his bag before basically bolting to the door.

Something’s yelled at the back of Tommy’s head, but the doors are already opening

Dream and him both basically stumble out of the train and onto the platform.

The man yells after them and Tommy starts running.

“Go, go, go!” Tommy manages between laughs, Dream is cackling as they sprint up the stairs.

Then they’re out in the big wide world, Tommy looks over his shoulder and they’re not being followed. Which is always a good sign.

Tommy looks at Dream.

They both stay silent for a split second.

Tommy cracks a smile.

That then starts a chain reaction of laughing. He shakes his head and holds his stomach as he laughs. Dream wheezes next to him, doubling over and they both laugh so hard that they can't breathe.

It's not even that funny.

Still Tommy has tears in his eyes as he laughs.

"His face!" Tommy manages through laughs, he struggles to breathe for a moment.

For... a good five minutes they laugh, and everytime they think they have it together. They just look at each other and start laughing all over again, something which is hilarious and makes Tommy feel a bit lighter.

Eventually they manage to get it together (for real this time), only snickering every now and again.

"Why'd he go for you?" Dream says, there's a smile in his voice and a badly suppressed laugh. "You were trying to sink into the floor."

Tommy shrugs, before looking around.

Yeah, they're at the plaza.

The plaza is one of the staples of Logstedchire youth. It's essentially a huge block of land, with shops around the outside. There's a couple of entrances in and out but the main way people get here is the train.

It's a concrete area, with a little grass area in the middle with some trees and benches.

There's a couple of teenagers ditching school, sitting on the ground and laughing about something. While some other people walk back with clothes and bags of whatever shopping they did.

It's a pretty nice area all things considered, there is a smashed up shop and some graffiti on the walls. But still— nice area all things considered.

And an area that Tommy knows like the back of his hand.

“Come on,” Tommy says.

Dream follows after him, he looks slightly nervous, his hands are in his pockets and his eyes flit back and forth as they move.

“You alright?”

“Yeah,” Dream says, “Just... people here don't really like heroes.”

“Chill, no one will recognise you,” Tommy drags Dream through one of the doorways.

They walk for a block or so, and Tommy freezes in front of the ice cream shop and he opens his mouth.

“Dream, Dream, Dream— I want that one and the rainbow—”

“Rainbow ice cream is just caramel that’s been—”

“Fuck off!” Tommy says, opening the door.

It’s a small store, with the ice creams in... the big ice cream holder things. Tommy does not know the correct word for it, but he’s enthralled anyway. There’s a couple of tables and chair around.

“Hey, Tommy.” Someone says.

Tommy looks up at the person manning the counter.

He can not remember their name.

“Hi!” Tommy responds cheerfully, then he looks at Dream. “You’re paying right?”

“Yup,” Dream says. “Go wild.”

“Wait really?”

“I don’t need the money,” Dream shrugs, “Might as well spend it on ice cream.”

“You’re my new favourite.”

Tommy turns to look at the ice cream options he has. The answer is... a lot really. He hums and walks up and down looking at all the options.

One might think this isn't an important choice, but it's the most significant thing that Tommy will do today. They have a lot of choices, and Tommy needs to make sure it's the optimal choice.

They have chocolate. That's a one and done deal.

They also have cookies and cream, that is also already automatically added onto the list of the hell ice cream he's making Dream pay for.

"If I get pistachio will you kill me?"

"Yes."

"Okay then!"

No pistachio, rude.

Tommy stops in front of the lemon sorbet. Yup.

They have vanilla bean.

Tommy pauses and looks at Dream. "If I get four scoops of vanilla bean, will I be judged?"

"A little."

“I want four scoops of vanilla bean.”

Dream rolls his eyes, and also looks at the ice cream. “Four scoops of vanilla bean in a cone please... and one of superhero ice cream in a cone too, as well.”

“No issue,” the cashier... who somehow knows Tommy says.

“Superhero. Really?”

“It’s the best flavour.”

“You are a hack and a fraud,” Tommy mutters.

“You got four scoops of vanilla bean!”

“It’s my favourite,” Tommy justifies. “Also less decisions that way. More of something you like is always a good thing.”

Dream just gives him a look. “Is it?”

“Fuck off,” Tommy mutters. “Mister Superhero, like— gee that’s a bit on the nose don’t you think?”

“I resent you,” Dream says.

The two ice cream cones are handed to Tommy, and Dream taps his card.

Tommy grins as Dream rolls his eyes.

“Don’t even—”

“Dream. I think we should make a club.”

He takes his ice cream off of Tommy before looking around nervously. “I don’t wanna take my mask off around here... where do they not have cameras?”

“Oh!” Tommy grins, “I got you.”

Dream sighs.

Tommy starts off to where he knows there’s a ladder.

Dream trails after him slightly more cautiously, and Tommy makes the bright decision to make everything Dream’s problem.

Tommy sprints across the road, Dream makes a noise of frustration before sprinting after him. A car honks at them clearly offended, and Tommy returns this by flipping them off before stepping up onto the pavement.

“So the club.”

“What do we even have in common?”

“Uh...” Tommy pauses.

They probably have more in common than Dream knows.

“We both like Theseus?” Tommy tries.

Dream laughs, “Yeah, that’s true, that’s true.”

Look at Tommy go, making connections and... whatever the fuck this is.

It’s nice to have someone on his side.

It’s nice to know that Phil and Wilbur are in the pretty big minority in the tower. Okay—maybe not a minority, but there are people who like Theseus in that tower. People who might back him up if anything ever goes wrong.

Someone who isn’t Techno and keeps trying to talk about emotions or whatever the fuck is happening there.

Tommy doesn’t really know himself.

“Can we call ourselves Theseus stans?”

Dream just gives him the biggest stink-eye in the history of stink-eyes which makes Tommy burst out laughing, he almost drops his ice cream.

“I like... music,” Dream adds.

“Everyone likes music.”

“George doesn’t.”

“Ugh. Gogy. What a man.”

Dream gives him a look, “You’ve met him like... once.”

“I think we should make a club,” Tommy actually looks before crossing the road this time. Dream sighs and holds onto the back of his hood. Jerking him backwards.

A car zooms past.

Dream lets go of his hood and they cross the road.

“I see why Techno and Wilbur like you so much— you do not get scared of anything, do you?”

“No?” Tommy laughs.

The statement is incredibly ironic. Sometimes he can’t look out the windows at the tower without his stomach sinking further and further into the floor until he feels like he’s about to throw up. Or sometimes Wilbur just... is Wilbur, and Tommy’s put on edge by that. Sometimes they talk about Theseus— maybe someone in the printing room, and Tommy has to leave the room.

He’s terrified all the time, and... maybe he’ll be scared forever.

“You weren’t scared of Wilbur or Techno when you met them.”

“Oh no, I was,” Tommy says. They turn a corner. “I’m still a bit scared of Wilbur— you can’t tell him I said that.”

“You’re scared of *Wilbur*?” Dream glances at him, apparently watching for any body language change. “Instead of Techno?”

“Techno’s...” one of the only things currently keeping Tommy afloat, someone who knows him better than perhaps he knows himself. One of about... four people who care about Tommy knowing he’s Theseus, one of the few people who actually care about him unconditionally— “Techno’s chill.”

Dream raises an eyebrow.

By some miracle of Prime, Tommy’s ice cream hasn’t even started to melt. Which is a great day for the Tommy community.

“You’re calling the man who did one hundred drills a day while he was training chill?”

“Yup.”

“But not the man who once wore his pyjamas to work and slept in a beanbag the entire day.”

“Mhm!”

Dream sighs and they keep walking.

Tommy turns down an alley and he looks to the end of it. The ladder is still there leaning up against one of the brick walls, in fact it’s still unfolded which might be an issue he can approach later. With a grin, Tommy walks down the alley.

It’s... well not the cleanest alley ever, there’s two dumpsters across the left wall, and rubbish piled around them. Someone’s sitting on the stairs of their backdoor, they death glare at Tommy and Tommy returns the glare with the same ferociousness .

Dream is standing firmly at the beginning of the alley, not daring to step across the invisible threshold.

Tommy sighs. “What are ya doin’?”

“Not a lot.”

“Come on. It’s just an alleyway, I’m sure you’ve been down way sketchier.”

“What does that even mean?”

“Ya don’t wanna know.”

Dream walks down the alley, head down and firmly not looking at the person sitting on their back step who laughs at him.

Walking up to the ladder Tommy shakes it slightly, it doesn’t budge or move. Which is always a great sign.

Then he starts climbing up one handed. Dream looks slightly horrified, but Tommy manages it so he’s standing on the very top of the ladder. Standing slightly precariously, the ladder shakes and Tommy shakes with it.

Managing to keep his balance he holds out his ice cream so Dream can grab it. “Can you take this please?”

Dream takes it wordlessly.

Tommy reaches up as high as he can, before grabbing onto the side of the building and pulling himself up. He uses his feet to propel him upwards, and uses the wall a bit like a rock climbing wall.

Eventually he manages and he twists around so his feet are dangling off the edge of the building. He looks at Dream who is apparently shocked if Tommy was judging by his wide eyes.

“Did you do parkour or something?”

“Used to move across buildings to get to school quicker,” Tommy explains, which isn’t even a lie. He did! And he’s pretty good at navigating his way across rooftops without his powers. (Once Tubbo and him had a race, and Tommy *just* won because he had the guts to jump over a gap far too wide.)

Dream blinks at him.

“Oh come on, number two hero. You can do this.”

“On a technicality I’m not number two yet,” Dream mutters.

“Ha. Number two.”

Dream blinks at him, a completely deadpan expression. Tommy somehow manages to not burst out laughing.

“I’m not apologising, that was fucking hilarious.”

Dream looks at both of the ice creams, “What do I do with these?”

“Throw them,” Tommy says.

Dream shakes his head.

So Dream— ever the idiot tries to navigate the ladder without any hands. He’s all shaky and shit, Tommy moves so he’s reaching down as much as he can.

Considering Dream is slightly taller than him he should be able to just pass up the ice creams. He doesn’t though, (ever the hero.) And Tommy glares at him as he struggles.

“How are you gonna pull yourself up, dickhead?”

Dream sighs and hands over the ice creams.

Tommy shuffles back so he has room to get up.

He pulls himself up and over onto the building with considerable more ease than Tommy. Before just looking around.

It’s a pretty big rooftop, as they’re on the roof of one of the bigger apartments.

There’s the small roof access building, and a couple of AC units scattered around the top. Tommy walks over to one of the huge caged AC units and sits against the fence. Then he starts eating his vanilla bean ice cream.

It’s just as good as he hoped.

Even better because he didn’t have to pay for it.

Dream sits down next to him, he glances at Tommy anxiously. “Uh... am I good to take off my mask?”

“Yeah?” Tommy says through a mouth full of ice cream. “Why wouldn’t you be?”

Dream takes off his mask.

He has a bunch of scars across his lower face, there’s one that goes through his lip and ends at the bottom of his nose. Overall there’s just a... heap of scars across his face, only the bottom half though.

Which seems a bit odd, but who’s Tommy to judge?

Dream puts his mask on his leg before also eating his ice cream.

They’re silent, which is nice. The breeze is also nice considering it’s a pretty warm day so that’s more than welcome. They’re quiet for a bit longer, because apparently they’re both pretty happy to just eat their ice cream.

Which is good. Silence is okay.

“Do you reckon being a vigilante would be difficult?” Dream asks.

Tommy almost chokes on his ice cream.

“What?”

“I mean...” Dream sighs, “Yeah, like... the law is against you. But— I dunno, sometimes I think.”

“You’d rather be a vigilante?”

“No,” Dream argues, but he sounds defensive. “I love my job, I work super hard to be at the level I am, being a vigilante would throw that out overnight. But... in my eyes a vigilante is a hero who’s self governed. That terrifies the agency, because then the heroes start thinking and then— no more control.”

“That’s why they signed in the—”

“Amendment to the vigilante act? Yeah probably.”

They’re silent again.

“I think that’s why Wilbur doesn’t like vigilantes,” Dream says absent-mindedly. “Well— one of the reasons. They govern themselves, people actually like them, they’re not just pawns in a system which allows the rich to win.”

“The way you're speaking sounds like a bit of a crime, Dream.”

Dream hums, “Who’s gonna believe you?”

“True, true,” Tommy leans up against the fence more, shifting his position. “But lying to friends and— people who are close to you has to be difficult surely? I can barely keep a secret as it is.”

“Yeah, I couldn’t keep that from... George and Sapnap, I already can’t keep secrets from them,” Dream mutters, “I guess that would be difficult... I love my job, don’t get me wrong. It’s nice to make a difference, and it’s even nicer to get paid for it. It’s just— sometimes you start thinking.”

“Talk to Techno about it, I dunno, he was a vigilante. If you actually wanted to leave the agency—”

“I can’t,” Dream mutters.

“Huh?”

Dream seems to realise what he’s said because his eyes go wide for a moment. “I mean—” he stumbles over his words slightly, “I’ve worked super hard to get to where I am. I can’t just throw that away.”

“Huh.” Tommy looks out across the skyline. It’s pretty today, the sky is clear, there’s no smoke from an explosion or anything. Overall... it’s been a pretty good day, all things considered. “How’d you become a hero?”

“A joke mostly,” Dream snorts. “I did fencing... and mixed martial arts and parkour. I’d done some archery and stuff too, my fencing instructor said that they could get me into one of the hero examinations and it went way further than I thought it would.”

“I’d say it turned out alright for you,” Tommy teases, nudging Dream in the arm. “What? Number two hero in L’Manberg? Good friends.”

Dream smiles, it reaches his eyes. Tommy can’t help but grin back.

He swats at Tommy before putting his black mask back on. “You’re a child. You must have the most boring life ever. What do you do? Homework?”

Well, last night he got stopped by Spectre. Who *was* his old favourite hero, and then he got kicked off a roof by Spectre so that stopped that. And before being stopped by Spectre he fought Elysium’s Angels, an organisation that has the interest of... seemingly no one apart from themselves.

One of his best friends was apparently one of the best fighters in an illegal underground fighting ring. One is currently hacking into servers and who fucking knows what in order to try and get answers and to take down said fighting rings. His other was in some freaky training program which now means he has a frighteningly accurate shot with a gun.

Yes. His life is incredibly boring—

Instead Tommy laughs, “It’s never boring managing SBI.”

It’s not... a *lie*. It’s an omission of truth— which technically might be a type of lie if he can remember something Tubbo said once. But he’s going to ignore Tubbo for this one.

“Why vanilla bean?” Dream asks, “I mean— it’s alright but it’s not as good as superhero. Which is clearly superior.”

“Respectfully, you are wrong.”

“I’m just not. You seem like someone who likes mint ice cream.”

“It’s good.”

“It tastes like toothpaste.”

“Have you never fucking brushed your teeth?”

Dream falls silent at that.

“Dude!”

“I brush my teeth!”

“Oh? Oh yeah? Sure ya do— and you’re not homeless.”

“I’m not homeless?”

“Okay,” Tommy grins at Dream, “Take me to your house.”

“No.”

“You don’t have a house!”

“I have a house!”

“I’m telling Techno.”

Tommy grabs his phone.

Dream yelps and knocks his phone out of his hand. His phone hits the ground and skids.

“My phone!” Tommy yells. “Come on jackass, this isn’t even my phone it’s my friends—” he picks it up and flips it over to make sure the screen isn’t cracked. “Oh. It’s fine.”

Dream gives him a look.

Tommy flips him off. “I’m telling Techno you’re homeless... Dream— if you need somewhere to stay, my apartment is always open.” His voice is laced with false sincerity, and Dream glares at him a little more.

Dream instead of doing anything glares.

Tommy flips him off again.

Dream’s retaliation is throwing a chunk of ice cream cone at Tommy.

And Tommy lets it rest, because he can not be bothered to get into a brawl with Dream, not today, that’s for sure. Instead he throws the cone piece over his shoulder and glares a little bit harder.

He lives in a society, that’s for fucking sure.

“Also, why does it look like you got the hell beat out of you?” Dream asks.

Tommy lets the shock show on his face, and he messes with his hair so that there’s hair over the bruise that appears to be ruining his fucking life. “No one,” Tommy says *way* too quickly. Even he realises it.

Dream appears to pause, like something’s just clicked in his mind. “Is someone hurting you?”

“What, no, no, nope,” Tommy says, he looks at Dream and shakes his head to prove his point. He might look a little bit frantic— “My roommate threw a book at my head, he didn’t *mean* to hit me in the head. He was supposed to throw it to the left a little, but he’s a terrible shot.”

Dream’s eyebrows furrow.

“Which roommate?”

“Tubbo,” Tommy says slowly, looking at Dream for a reaction. He doesn’t get one so Tommy keeps talking. “I insulted his cooking, he threw one of his textbooks at me.”

In reality Tommy got punched in the forehead last night... but Dream doesn’t need to know that.

“Okay,” Dream says, in a voice that screams *‘I am keeping a closer eye on this, what the fuck?’* And the sentiment is sweet, Tommy will admit that, but really fucking unhelpful at the moment. “If you say so.”

Tommy is going to commit a crime— well another one apart from being a vigilante. And the various breaking and entering charges against Theseus at this point— and those times he’s stolen stuff from stores.

Once he stole an uncollected pizza. That’s just evil.

Finally Tommy finishes his ice cream, and Dream taps around on his phone more. It rings and Dream sighs.

“Sap.”

Some muffled speaking that Tommy can’t hear.

“I’m good?” Another pause, “Phil did what— okay then, he yelled at them?”

“*Yeah dude!*” He hears Sapnap yell through the line, still slightly muffled but there, “*It was so cool.*”

Dream nods slowly, before looking at Tommy. “Okay, I’ll see you in a moment.” Another pause, “Yup, yup, see you then.” He hangs up and looks at Tommy. “Let’s go.”

Tommy walks over to where he knows the ladder is, and his stomach drops.

Heights. Heights. Ah fuck— he’s scared of.

“Shit,” Tommy mutters. His hands are shaking in what must be an unhealthy amount. He struggles to speak for a moment, how is he supposed to— he takes a deep breath. It’s fine. He is... fine.

Everything is fantastic, he’s okay.

“You okay?” Dream asks, there’s actual concern in his voice and Tommy hates it just a little.

“Don’t like heights,” Tommy manages, he looks away from the edge of the building.

Dream looks somehow even more concerned. “You work in a tower.”

“I am aware.”

“You haven’t told anyone?”

“No,” Tommy laughs, “Just... give me a moment.”

Dream gives him several moments, he’s completely quiet.

Tommy eventually finds the courage to slip off the side of the building and climb down off the ladder. His heart is beating irrationally fast, he grits his teeth and stands on the nice solid ground where he can't experience the dramas of fall damage.

Dream gets off the roof and they head off.

The walk is much quieter than the walk here was. Tommy busies himself catching up on emails and whatever else happened.

"Tommy?" Dream says.

Tommy looks up from his phone. "Yeah?"

"I've said your name like three times, you okay?"

"Yeah?" Tommy glances at Dream then back down to his phone. "Just zoned out."

"You've been doing that a lot."

"I suppose."

Dream apparently gives up with this angle because he goes silent and shakes his head. Tommy looks back down at his phone. He has no clue when he got this many emails but now he has this many emails.

They're silent for a bit longer before Tommy puts his phone down.

"How is Fundy?"

“He’s doing well, all things considered— he won’t be on patrol for a couple more months. But apparently he’s doing okay. I brought him a black forest cake a couple of days ago, he laughed so hard the nurses were scared he’d pop a stitch.”

“Glad he’s okay.”

“Are you okay?” Dream asks, “I mean... the entire situation was pretty intense.”

“I am fine.”

“If you need to talk to someone about it the tower has a bunch of resources and therapists and —”

“Oh my fucking god,” Tommy groans, “I am fine. Okay slightly shaken up, sure. But everyone keeps asking me if I’m okay and I am going to fucking pull out my hair. Everything is fine— alright? If I need to talk to someone I will, okay?”

Dream gives him a look, they both appear to know he’s lying. “There’s no shame in it. I think most of the heroes have therapists— Wilbur doesn’t but we’re working on it. It was a traumatic event and—”

“I am literally going to stab you,” Tommy deadpans. He finds himself meaning it too.

Dream apparently decides to drop that topic too.

Mans is really going through a checklist, and honestly? Tommy can respect that more than he gives credit for. Tommy checks the road (both ways) before he crosses, because he’s a responsible legend.

Ha. Responsible. Ah yes, Thomas Underscore, the most responsible person in the history of responsible people.

“Why don’t you reckon there are more vigilantes?” Dream asks, “I mean... in Logstedchire there are four. Surely powered people would become vigilantes.”

“They either die, get recruited by some sort of gang or get arrested,” Tommy deadpans. “That’s why the four Logstedchire vigilantes are so famous— they’ve been active for almost three years and no one has got them. Aurelian and Slimecicle have been around for even longer and they’ve all evaded capture.”

“Is avoiding heroes that difficult?”

“I’d hope it was,” Tommy deadpans, “Otherwise what’s the point of havin’ you lot around?”

Dream snorts.

“Why you asking me anyway? I’m sure the tower has a vigilante expert or something, someone who’s studied them for years.”

“Sam...” Dream trails off, “But he hasn’t lived in Logstedchire for a long time.”

“He’s from here?”

“Yup. But again, it’s been a while, and it’s not like we have a heap of people in the tower who are pro-vigilante most of them don’t care. I’d say like... Puffy, Sam and I. Most of them just don’t really care. Just wanted to hear what you had to say about it.”

“Huh.”

“Do you like vigilantes?”

“It’s complicated,” Tommy says, and that is true. It is complicated. “They hold a lot of power. Surely that gets tiring for them? To hold all this power and to not have anyone above them to place blame on.”

“Maybe,” Dream mutters, “But they do good work anyway.”

“Most of them,” Tommy corrects.

Dream stops and looks at Tommy, “They all do.”

“Okay. Can we— not?”

“Sure,” Dream says. “Is that the entrance to the station?”

Tommy looks to his left, sure enough, there’s the entrance. He nods and they take the stairs down underground into the station.

There’s someone busking on the platform across from them. People are bustling around, there’s a kid screaming too. Just like... straight up screaming and having a tantrum on the ground. Tommy steps around the kid.

Dream follows after him a bit more nervously. His eyes dart to the kid screaming on the ground for a second longer, and Tommy sighs.

This is painful to watch.

“Come on, we’ll miss our train, there’s one in like thirty seconds.”

With a nod, Dream follows after him.

Tommy sees the train and runs.

They both manage to get into the train just before the door closes.

Tommy stumbles towards one of the seats and basically collapses onto it. He puts his bag on the ground and Dream falls onto the seat next to him. They're both breathing heavily... from y'know trying to catch a train.

On the train Tommy does normal things like respond to emails. Make sure Wilbur isn't being cancelled (again). And then annoy Theseus stans because he's really just built different.

Tommy is pretty sure Dream plays some knock off version of Flappy Bird, but he has zero proof.

They stay quiet.

"Tommy?" Someone says, and Tommy looks up from his phone.

It's Niki. Who looks... terrible, even worse than Tommy does today. She has a worryingly dark black eye, a split lip, a cut across her hairline and several smaller bruises littering her jaw and forehead.

Along with that she's in what appears to be an apron that has had something thrown at it. Maybe coffee? Judging by the stain. She looks exhausted.

"Holy fuck," Tommy says, "Are you okay?"

Niki's hand goes up to her eye, "Yeah! It looks worse than it actually is, I got a hockey ball to the eye at practice."

Dream looks up, "Holy— Niki?"

"Hi, Dream," Niki says.

She sits in the seat across from them. Dropping her bag onto the ground. "How are you?"

"What happened to you?"

"Mixed martial arts, hockey, customer service," Niki says, her voice still soft and filled with kindness. Although her eyes look like they'd kill someone if given the chance. "Tommy? What happened to you?"

"My roommate threw a book at my head after I insulted his cooking."

It's a great lie because it's based on a true story.

Niki laughs, "Ah, roommates."

"Roommates indeed," Tommy mutters. "Are you sure you're okay? That looks like a really nasty bruise."

"It surprisingly doesn't hurt that much," Niki pokes at her eye and Tommy winces. She doesn't flinch. "The friction burn on my back is the main issue here."

"Friction burn?"

“I got shoved onto the turf,” Niki says with a smile, “Life advice for both of you, field hockey players are incredibly nice, until you get onto the field. Then they are incredibly brutal.”

Dream still looks concerned, “That happened from a hockey ball?”

“Yup,” Niki sighs and relaxes into her seat more.

They all fall silent.

There’s really not a lot more to say.

Niki sighs and Tommy copies her.

She shifts in her seat and Tommy does the same thing. This makes Niki raise an eyebrow and Tommy raises his eyebrow. “Stop copying me.”

“I’m not copying you,” Tommy says while clearly copying Niki.

Niki glares.

Tommy glares.

Dream hits Tommy in the shoulder, which makes him look at Dream, he’s being all polite, eye contact and all. He’s not completely cruel, only partly. “Don’t annoy Niki.”

Tommy stops annoying Niki, crosses his arms and sulks.

“So, where are you hopping off?” Dream asks.

“At the tower,” Niki says, “I’m picking up Floof.”

“Techno said he’s giving Floof to you tonight?” Tommy says slowly.

Niki smiles brightly, “Oh he can try not handing over Floof. You can see how that goes for him.”

And... Tommy is terrified of Niki, good to know.

Dream looks even more fearful than he does, which again, good to know. It’s a healthy amount of fear, he’s decided. Niki is objectively terrifying, in a friendly way however.

“Right...” Dream says, voice wavering slightly. “Cool. Good to know.”

Niki smiles brighter.

“Niki, what’s the worst word you know?”

“Excuse me?” Niki laughs slightly nervously.

“Worst word you know, I’m a child and learning. I currently know callipygian but I need more on my list.”

Niki hesitates, looking at Dream bewildered then back at Tommy. She opens her mouth and then closes it again. “I— mucus. It’s a terrible word.”

“Mucus and callipygian... can I use them in the same sentence?”

Dream wheezes, “I sure hope not.”

The train rattles and the lights flicker. Tommy yelps and grabs onto Dream. Dream starts snickering, and in return Niki gives him a look. Apparently it’s terrifying enough that Dream stops laughing straight away.

“Niki, you are now my favourite woman.”

“Oh. Thank you, Tommy.”

“No issue.”

They fall back into an easy silence, and Tommy just scrolls through Twitter the entire time. Who knows what Dream and Niki do. They talk about... something, something adulty and boring that Tommy only hears a couple words of.

He thinks they’re talking about taxes—

Oh shit he has to pay taxes now, he actually makes money.

Can he hire someone to do his taxes? Surely the tower has a finance person.

Then Dream and Niki stand up, Tommy looks at them curiously.

He glances up at the electronic sign saying where they are. They’re at the right stop.

The train announcer didn't say anything though, that's weird. Weird but not unheard of, so Tommy picks his bag up off the ground and follows after Niki and Dream who are still talking passionately about something.

Tommy finally tunes in as he steps off the train.

"Cats are so much better," Dream says, "They're smarter, can feed themselves... domesticated dogs would probably die without humans. Cats were domesticated about ten thousand years ago while dogs were domesticated forty thousand—"

"Meaning cats had no use to humans," Niki argues as they walk up the stairs. "Until very recently, while dogs did. Which means dogs are far superior."

Tommy zones out again, fuck this.

His phone beeps and Tommy looks at it.

Nuclear Physicist (???):

when will you be home?

Hack And A Fraud:

Like around five

He doesn't get a response after that, but Tubbo is notoriously bad with responses and he supposes this isn't an exception. Dream and Niki keep debating the use of cats and dogs, and Tommy continues to ignore them.

They approach the tower eventually, Niki and Dream *still* debating cats against dogs. Tommy having responded to two more emails. He's skilled, what can he say? (Dream pulls him out of

the way of a bike like three times).

Tommy grabs his pass absentmindedly and Niki grabs one that she apparently has. It's a visitor pass, and he supposes Techno or Phil gave her one. Which makes sense.

Someone stands in front of Tommy.

Tommy looks up at the guard. "Huh?"

"Sorry, the building is closed."

"I work here?" Tommy says, glancing at Niki who looks just as puzzled.

He shows the guard his pass again, the guard looks down at the pass and nods seemingly approvingly. "No one is allowed in apart from tech support."

"Why?" Dream asks, he shows his pass and the guard's eyes widen slightly.

"We have reason to believe that Elysium's Angels have infiltrated the tower."

"What?" Dream whispers. "What do you mean—"

The guard glances at Tommy and Niki, "I can not discuss it with two civilians present. After a review of how Elysium got in on their attack on the tower, we've concluded that someone is working for Elysium."

"Huh?" Tommy yells, "Like a hero or—"

“Not a hero.” The guard says. “All of their files, communications and anything else have been meticulously searched. I would recommend you go home...” the guards eyes flicker down towards the pass again. “Tommy, complete any work you must do there.”

Niki sighs, “I need to talk to Techno.”

The guard raises an eyebrow.

Niki smiles sweetly...

Tommy is fucking terrified for his life if he’s being completely honest.

Niki glares, before grabbing her phone.

She holds the phone up to her ear. “Techno, you need to bring Floof out. Yes I know, I’m here right now. Techno... if you don’t hand over that dog I swear— thank you!”

Tommy and Dream glance at each other.

She puts her phone away.

“Dream,” the guard says, apparently slightly nervous. “You’re allowed to go in.”

“Oh,” Dream says intelligently. “Yeah, okay. Um... see you Tommy. Thanks for getting me out of a lecture.”

“No issue!” Tommy says and means it, “Thanks for the ice cream.”

The corners of Dream's eyes crinkle and Tommy assumes he's smiling underneath the mask.

Tommy crosses his arms. "I'm gonna go..." Tommy says slowly. "You'll be alright?"

Niki nods, "Yup. Stay safe."

"You too."

And like that Tommy walks back to the train station. It's a boring walk if he's being completely honest, nothing amazing happens.

Like it's boring. Just... incredibly boring, Tommy is bored out of his fucking brain. He sits down on the train and sighs.

Welp... he's spent way too much time on this train today, something he will never do again. Maybe he can ask Wilbur to pick him up tomorrow. He'll ask Wilbur to pick him up tomorrow, that seems like a good deal.

Tommy watches people exit and enter the train.

Again, incredibly boring.

Eventually he gets off the train at his stop, and starts the walk to his house. Again, nothing exciting happens. He does almost get knocked off of his feet by someone sprinting around a corner and then a skateboard, but he manages to not fall over.

Big day.

Clambering up the stairs, he fumbles for his keys before opening the door.

There he flops down onto the couch face down.

It's only like two as well.

He flips over and stares at the roof, once upon a time Tommy had a heap of free time. He'd sometimes work from four in the afternoon to one in the morning. Then he'd have an entire day to do whatever.

Now his whole nine to five routine means he has no fucking clue what to do with his free time. Purpled's probably still at the tower, Tommy should call him to make sure that he's okay or something.

Then use Purpled to find out about any information.

He puts it onto the to do list and closes his eyes.

He could have a nap, that seems like a practical use of time. That way he might be able to go on patrol later tonight...

The apartment is annoyingly clean, there's nothing to do. Ranboo called dibs on making dinner before he goes to work, Purpled and Tubbo aren't gonna be back until like five. Ranboo will be back in about an hour, give or take.

An hour to himself.

What the fuck is he supposed to do?

Tommy's phone buzzes and he groans, reaching for it without looking up from the couch cushion. He grabs it and looks at it.

Literally the Colour Purple:

Everything's good
They arrested someone for involvement
Don't come back to work, Phil says.

The *Intern*:

okay

Tommy goes to reply to Purpled with a bit more detail.

The door handle rattles and Tommy jumps slightly. He holds his phone to his chest. It sounds like someone's trying to unlock the door.

Why's Ranboo home early?

It takes a couple attempts but they manage to do it.

The door opens slowly.

It's Tubbo.

Nice.

Tommy looks up again.

Wait.

It is Tubbo.

What the fuck is Tubbo doing here—

With a burn covering half of his face. It appears to be healed.

There are bruises and cuts littering his face too, he has a black eye... which is pretty hard to form unless it's been a while. There's several cuts across his forehead and cheek, and he has a jumper wrapped around his arm so Tommy doesn't even want to imagine what's under that.

Along with that there's some rips and holes in his shirt and pants.

Holy fuck. What happened to Tubbo?

“Tubbo?”

Tubbo jumps and looks at Tommy, his eyes are wide and... fucking terrified. This is *Tubbo* who only like a week ago Tommy saw threaten Schlatt as if there was no tomorrow. Who only like a week ago would be ready to be shot at.

He's shaking.

“Y— you're not supposed to be home,” Tubbo manages.

“Neither are you,” Tommy replies softly, he stands up and Tubbo takes a step back, hitting his back against the door. Tommy stops where he is, then takes a small step back. “I'm not gonna hurt you Tubbo—”

“I know that,” Tubbo says. “I know that—”

Tubbo presses his lips together into a straight line and it wavers slightly.

“What happened?” Tommy asks.

Tubbo looks at him, his shoulders are shaking but he isn’t crying. It’s like he’s sobbing without the tears. “I—” he shakes his head, before pressing his hands against his eyes. Shaking his head more. “I— can’t—”

“Hey, hey— you don’t have to tell me.”

Tubbo opens his mouth and closes it again. “They—” he cuts himself off and shakes his head. “I’m sorry.”

“Hey, hey, it’s alright,” Tommy stands up and Tubbo doesn’t flinch away so he’d call it a win for today. “You’re alright.”

“I’m sorry,” Tubbo repeats, “I’m so fucking sorry.” He’s still not crying, “I can’t—”

Tommy takes a few steps towards Tubbo, “You didn’t do anything wrong Tubbo, you don’t have to tell me anything.”

Tubbo looks at him, tears welling in his eyes and Tommy just wants to grab Tubbo and hug him until he can transfer some of Tubbo’s emotions to himself. But he can’t because Tubbo is jumpy and he’s scared.

“I—” Tubbo manages, “I’m sorry.”

“You’re okay Tubbo.”

Tubbo looks at him, there’s some sort of exhaustion there that Tommy can’t explain easily. About seventeen years of exhaustion behind his eyes and Tommy doesn’t know how to get rid of that.

“I’m tired, Tommy,” Tubbo whispers.

Then tears start flowing, he just stands there, trying to wipe them all himself. And in no world is that going to work. Not really, at least, so Tubbo cries and Tommy stands there. His shoulders shake as he cries.

It’s not as loud as last time, his crying is much quieter than the alley breakdown. He folds in on himself, hugging his stomach and crying. Tommy just stands there, because there’s not much else he can do.

Tubbo looks up at Tommy, eyes filled with tears. “I—” and he breaks down into tears again, Tommy takes a small step forwards and Tubbo looks up at him with terrified eyes. Tommy wants to cry at the sight.

“Hey, hey, Tubbo. You’re okay.”

“I’m not— I’m not,” Tubbo shakes his head and looks up at Tommy again. “I’m not! I don’t know what to do— I don’t—”

“We’ll figure it out,” Tommy says carefully, “Okay? We’ll figure it out. Tubbo, look at me.”

Tubbo looks him in the eyes.

“We’ll figure this out, whatever *this* is. We’ll figure it out.”

Tubbo rips his gaze away and stomps across the apartment, then he starts pacing back and forth running his hands through his hair. Revealing more of the burn.

It's healed, and that's perhaps the weirdest part.

Why is it healed?

Did someone use healing powers on Tubbo? It doesn't really make sense—

“You can't help with this Tommy!” Tubbo yells, “Okay? I'm on my own for this one—”

“No you're not.”

“I am!” Tubbo screams.

The house is quiet, neither of them know what to say.

“This is all my fault!” Tubbo yells again, there are tears streaming down his cheeks and somehow Tommy can't bring himself to even try to be mad at Tubbo. “Okay? This is my fault I'm going to fix this—”

“Tubbo,” Tommy says, it's quiet too. Somehow it still cuts Tubbo off. “What happened?”

Tubbo takes a deep breath, his hands are shaking and it seems like he's thinking a bit too hard. “I— I think they were people from rings,” his voice shakes. “Maybe they knew I was looking into them? I was going for lunch with some of my friends and— I left campus, I was by myself and they just—”

Tubbo grabs onto the kitchen bench with enough force that Tommy's surprised it doesn't break. He grits his teeth, "Then one of them shot a fucking firework into my face."

"What?" Tommy whispers.

This is the quietest the apartment has been ever since it was just Tommy.

They both know it.

"They shot a firework into my face," Tubbo says again, his hands shaking. "They sorta missed— y'know? It wasn't exactly done well. And then someone healed it and holy fuck that hurt so much."

"Fuck we have to take you to the ER, who fucking knows how much the healing fucked it up —"

"It's fine," Tubbo says, batting away Tommy's hand.

"We're not debating on this, you need to go to the ER."

"We don't have insurance, asshole!" Tubbo yells, there's a few unwiped tears from before but he hasn't broken down yet. Yet, being the key word of that sentence.

"Yeah we do, dickhead," Tommy spits back. "I have it, you have it. We're going to the ER, it's a facial burn."

"I'm fine, Tommy," Tubbo snaps. "I'm not going to the ER—"

"You fucking are," Tommy says.

Sparks jump to his hand, and Tommy puts that hand behind his back. Not the most effective method, but if he's trying not to freak out Tubbo.

Tubbo looks at him, his lip wobbling. "Can I go later? Please? They're gonna ask me what happened and I can't—" he chokes up again. "It's already healed, I can— later. Please? Please."

Tommy looks at Tubbo.

This is a terrible idea, who knows what healing that burn did. But Tubbo is already on the brink of tears and Tommy doesn't want to shatter that into a million pieces, they can go later in the day.

Tubbo looks so scared.

Tommy opens his mouth and then closes it, "Okay."

Tubbo nods, "I'm sorry—"

"You didn't do anything wrong."

Tubbo's eyes fill with tears, "I'm sorry. I— sorry, I could've—"

He stumbles forwards and Tommy wraps his arms around Tubbo. He hugs him tight, but not too tight incase there's an injury that they don't know about, which knowing Tubbo is more than likely.

"I'm sorry," he murmurs into Tommy's shoulder. His voice is thick and filled with tears, and considering that his shoulders are shaking the amount they are, Tommy's pretty sure he's

crying for real this time.

Tommy holds onto Tubbo as tight as he can, as his best friend cries.

Tubbo grips onto Tommy like his life depends on it, something inside Tommy's brain knows it might leave a bruise. But he doesn't care. "I'm sorry," Tubbo whispers again and Tommy just hugs him tighter.

"It's okay," Tommy says, "We'll figure this out."

Tubbo just cries harder. Gasping for breaths and gripping onto Tommy even tighter (somehow.)

Tommy hugs his friend harder, hoping that this might hold him together. Whatever is breaking, he wants to hold it together.

And whoever did this to Tubbo... well they should be fucking terrified. And they should hope that Theseus is kinder to them, than they were Tubbo.

Chapter End Notes



This tina!tommy & purpled meme drawn by the lovely Aza

Chapter Summary:

- Tommy is on patrol. He fights Elysium with Aurelian
- Spectre shows up, he only wants information but this does not stop Tommy from having a freak out
- Next day. Dream is like “Tommy, I will buy you food if you give me a reason to leave the tower.” And Tommy agrees to this.

- Discduo fluff! They also talk about what being a vigilante is like and Tommy my guy is lying through his teeth.
- They see Niki who's a bit beat up from last night's fight with Elysium and they chat. The tower arrests someone for working with Elysium's angels
- Tommy goes home. Tubbo arrives home a moment later looking all beat up and with a healed burn. He starts apologising for something. Then he says that perhaps someone discovered he was looking into fighting rings and so they went after him.

boom

In Which Tommy Needs a Nap (really badly)

Chapter Summary

i was sleep deprived while writing about 90% of this. it shows.

tommy vs. sleep vs. SBI
who will win the battle?

Chapter Notes

Hi. You may be wondering. "Ellis why did the update take so long?"

BITCH SO MANY THINGS HAPPENED IN MY PERSONAL LIFE, AND I HAVE REWRITTEN ALMOST EVERY ASPECT OF THIS CHAPTER AT LEAST TWICE. I DELETED 5K WORDS OF WORK AT SOME POINT BECAUSE I DIDN'T LIKE IT AND NOW I HAVE 12K WORDS OF WHAT I'D CALL A MESS OF A CHAPTER, BUT I HAD FUN WRITING IT SO FUCK YOU

Basically I missed writing all tinaaos, so... sleep deprivation the chapter!

Warnings: medical talk, mentions of burns and injuries and sleeping pills. There's some arguing. Guns and implied/referenced past abuse (in conversation)

Chapter summary at the end as always!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tubbo is shaking the entire trip to the hospital.

Shaking in the waiting room. Every now and again his hand brushes against the scar and he winces.

There's not a lot Tommy can do to calm him down either. He'll just bounce his leg or pick at skin or something else.

Eventually they get called in, and Tubbo jumps when his name is said. Before they head off to the room where the doctor is giving a comforting smile.

The doctor himself is incredibly unassuming and chill. He wears a red, black and white patterned mask over the bottom of his face— which does make sense if dealing with sick people.

The room they're in is a consultation room. There are two chairs against the wall that they're sitting in.

The doctor has a computer, a desk and a potted plant that's slightly crispy at the edges.

The clock on the wall is driving into Tommy's brain as the doctor explains Tubbo's entire situation.

He's shaking as the doctor explains that it's healed well, but will probably have pretty severe burns because the healing was done rapidly and with powers.

Tubbo gets painkillers.

The doctor says again due to the rapid nature of the healing things could go wrong. And so Tommy's instructed to watch it and make sure the colour doesn't get any darker.

Then Tubbo gets told about phantom pains, and his face drops.

"So you might feel the pain of it burning again, I can assure you it is not burning and will not burn."

"Oh." Tubbo says.

"It's really shitty," the doctor admits with a slightly sad expression. "There's however not much we can do about it, we can give sleeping meds so you sleep better through the night."

Tubbo looks at Tommy.

"After a traumatic incident too—"

"Wait, what?" Tubbo says.

The doctor glances at Tommy, then back at Tubbo. "Doctors have confidentiality, that means I am not allowed to tell anyone about your case without due cause. It's a law all doctors must abide by."

"Your point?" Tubbo grits out.

"Tubbo, is it?"

Tubbo nods.

"I've seen this sorta thing before, most doctors have, especially here. Gang violence, fighting, things of the sort."

"Oh," Tubbo says quietly, he looks down at his feet. "I'm— I'm not in a gang."

"Okay," the doctor says slowly and turns so he's facing both Tommy and Tubbo. His eyes stay on Tommy a moment longer before going back to Tubbo. "You don't have to tell me what happened, in fact I'd probably have to report it."

Tubbo's eyes shoot wide and he shakes his head.

“That’s alright, that’s alright,” the doctor gives Tubbo a knowing look. “Did you tell them what they wanted to know?”

“Yeah...” Tubbo whispers, “They healed it after that.”

“Okay then,” the doctor looks back at Tommy. “Remember you can ask your...”

“Best friend— technically guardian,” Tubbo says, not looking at Tommy. “But he took my last name once he was my legal guardian, it’s complicated.”

“That’s alright, you can ask him to leave at any point and by law he’s required.”

“I— don’t want him to,” Tubbo manages to stammer out. “If that’s alright?”

“Of course, of course,” the doctor nods before leaning back in his chair. “There’s not a lot more I can do if I’m being completely honest with you. I’d recommend getting the police involved—”

Tubbo snorts. “Yeah, okay. I’ll be written off as already being in a gang. We both know it.”

The doctor’s eyes look sad but he nods. “Okay,” he grabs a pamphlet from the desk and hands it to Tubbo. Something about mental health and Tubbo shoves it straight into his pocket.

Tommy’s not exactly shocked about that, but he sure as fuck isn’t happy about it.

“Can I go?” Tubbo stammers.

The doctor sighs softly, before turning to his computer. “I’m going to give you sleeping meds,” he explains quietly. “You don’t need to take them, there are no major side effects for most people. Don’t have anything grapefruit while on these, that will—”

“Effect how the pill absorbs into your bloodstream,” Tubbo sighs like he’s reading off a shopping list. “No drugs or alcohol, and come back if I’m having negative side effects that impact my day to day. I might have weird dreams— what else?”

Tommy swears the doctor smiles. “Not your first go?”

“First one willingly,” Tubbo adds under his breath. Instead he nods at the doctor, who in return looks slightly worried, and still prints out the prescription.

“If it starts hurting a lot, or there’s any major discoloration, come back and we’ll discuss something else. It looks like it’s healed well and that’s about all I need. Painkillers might help with pain from moving your face.”

Tubbo nods and stands up.

The doctor hands Tommy the prescription and Tommy doesn’t move for a moment. “Surely you can’t prescribe these, not based on what you’ve seen?”

“I can prescribe what I want, within reason. I have dealt with many cases like this, it’s not like gang violence is incredibly rare here. I have a couple of predictions of what happened, and after incidents like that I doubt whether he’ll sleep very well which directly impacts any healing and the scar fading.”

“Okay…” Tommy mutters, “Thank you.”

“Look after him,” the doctor says. “Look after yourself,” he directs at Tubbo and Tubbo gives a polite smile.

“Let’s go,” Tubbo says, he’s jumpy so they probably should leave.

The sleeping pills do not work slightly.

Tommy knows this.

He has not slept properly in three days. Maybe... six hours over those three days, slowly getting less and less as he fucks up his sleep schedule a little bit more.

The problem with living in such a small apartment is that if one person can’t sleep they all can’t sleep. It’s been this way for a while, there’s only so much that a wall between the two bedrooms can prevent.

Tubbo’s having nightmares and that again, means that nobody is sleeping.

Purpled manages to catch some extra sleep at work, he takes the beanbag and will sleep for two hours (on the dot, he doesn’t set an alarm it’s actually really freaky.) Ranboo manages to catch a couple of hours after school.

Ranboo has also decided that it’s his sole job to care for Tubbo, both of them have had time off school. And Tommy would be mad about it, but he’s too fucking tired to think. Purpled’s been doing all the thinking and he says that they can have a week off, but then need to return.

Somewhere in all of that he’s pretty sure Ranboo is currently trying to move to Tubbo’s school so he’s not alone.

Again, Tommy’s too fucking tired to think.

And Tommy... ah Tommy.

He's tried sleeping, ruining his sleep schedule in the process. He's just on edge, he can feel his powers almost buzzing inside of his body, keeping him awake. It's actually... really weird, his powers keeping him awake is not something that has ever happened before.

"Why aren't you sleeping?" Purpled asks.

"My powers are keeping me awake."

"That's not how they work."

"What do you know about my powers?"

Purpled shrugs.

Tommy brushes off the whole powers are currently glitching the fuck out thing, it's like... probably fine. Maybe growing pains, it makes sense considering his powers. So he promptly ignores it.

He's at work, managing to keep it together quite well (if he does say so himself).

Then out of fucking nowhere his door falls off the frame.

Tommy looks at it. "You're not supposed to do that."

That is correct, his door is not supposed to just fall off its hinges. Tommy sighs.

He goes back to doing his work.

Then... okay, the first time Tommy can accept this as a thing that's happening.

Then his window explodes.

Tommy can't do anything but sigh and yell for Phil. There's glass everywhere, and Tommy puts his head in his hands. He stays there for a moment and just regrets every decision that lead up to this.

Phil runs in like someone's been murdered. He stands at the doorway with a sword that he did not have before. Then looks around frantically.

Then he looks at the window. "That's not supposed to break."

"I know," Tommy sighs.

The worst part is that it's not even like there's any warning. No red sparks, nothing goes red at all, it just happens. His office is falling apart around him, and that means that he's now very scared about a power outburst.

When the printer explodes basically in his hands, Tommy screams.

Terror goes through his heart for a moment and he throws his arms up.

Heat and fire and explosions and Fundy and his ears are ringing—

Tommy stares at his shaking hands, before looking at the people staring at him.

This... feels like something that should be addressed at some point or another, an arm wraps around his shoulders and Tommy jumps to see that it's just Techno.

Techno drags him out of that room and up to the SBI floor.

He's been avoiding Techno, and apparently that has not gone well because now he's sitting on one of the kitchen bench stools looking at his hands which are shaking so much he's not sure if he could hold anything. (And that's if he's tried.)

"What is happening to me?" Tommy asks quietly, his hands are still shaking. "Things keep breaking around me and I don't know—"

"I'll figure it out," Techno says, and there's a look in his eyes which means that he's going to do everything in his fucking power to figure it out. Tommy lets himself trust it, just for this one time. "Okay? I'll figure this out, you just need to sleep and relax."

"I can't," Tommy whispers.

Techno glances up to the roof, where Henry is thought to reside. (He's an AI, he doesn't really live anywhere but everyone looks up at the roof when addressing him.) "Hey, Henry, stop recording."

"Sure, boss," Henry's voice filters through the room. "Look after Thomas."

Techno looks back at Tommy, concern across his face. "Why?"

"My powers are keeping me awake," Tommy whispers, just in case someone is listening in. Considering Techno seems to strain to hear he's probably safe. "It's like... the hum electricity makes when it's live. But it's in my body. I can't focus it's just always— there."

"How long has it been like this?"

“Five days,” Tommy manages to stammer out. “My roommate came back— really hurt and I don’t know what to—”

“Okay, okay, okay,” is the first thing Techno says, “Everything’s fine, I’m gonna need you to calm down so you don’t explode something. Especially if your powers are glitching out, okay, I need you to chill.”

The seat next to them falls apart and Tommy balls both of his hands into fists, trying to maintain some sort of control. “I can’t control it,” Tommy says, “I thought I could— I can’t control it anymore. I thought—”

“Hey, hey,” Techno says, “You’re fine. The window will be fixed, so will the chair and the printer.”

“I could hurt someone.”

“Maybe,” Techno says, because he’s a lot of things but a liar has never been one of them, and probably never will be. “Not on purpose however, let me— let me handle this. Tommy, let me—”

“What the fuck are you going to do?” Tommy whispers.

“Let me worry about that,” Techno says evenly, “Okay, kid? You’re alright.”

Tommy looks at him before slowly nodding.

“You’re a kid, alright, you don’t need to handle this all alone. Let me stress about this, and let me figure this one out. Okay?”

And Tommy... he's just *so tired*. In every sense of the word. It's weighing down on his bones and his existence, it's ruining everything. For once he just wants to not worry, about something, anything. About rent, about himself, about Theseus, about his friends— about anything.

It might be selfish to pass this off to Techno— he's too tired to care.

Tommy nods. "Please," he whispers.

Techno nods, "I'll figure this one out. What you need to do is get some proper sleep."

He does not get proper sleep.

Then he doesn't get proper sleep again.

That is not for lack of trying at all, he lays in bed staring at the roof. Or even closing his eyes. He lays there for what must be *hours* each night, trying to sleep. He just... he just can't. Something in his bones is buzzing.

He can't sleep.

He has no idea how to describe it, he's awake. He's awake because he can feel energy in his veins, he's exhausted. He knows he's exhausted, but his brain has tricked him into thinking he's awake.

There's a clock in the living room.

He's not sure when the clock got there, but it's drilling into his fucking brain like nothing else. Just a constant tick, the seconds are passing— the seconds are passing and he really needs to sleep.

But he can't sleep.

Tubbo's sleeping at least.

Then there's a blood curdling scream and Tommy winces.

The house is silent for a moment longer, and Tommy is the one that gets to his feet and trudges out to the living room, where apparently Tubbo has decided he is living until further notice.

Tubbo's sitting up straight with the blanket stuffed in his mouth, he's biting down on it and apparently with quite a bit of force. Tears are streaming down his face. He looks up at Tommy.

"Hurts," Tubbo grits out.

"Hey," Tommy says softly hopping onto the couch. Tubbo doesn't flinch away, and that's as close to a win as they're going to get. "You're okay, you're alright. No one's gonna hurt you."

"They did," Tubbo whispers.

Fucking. Ouch, okay then. Tommy nods and shuffles slightly closer to Tubbo. Tubbo just looks at him like he's finally lost the final screw and... look Tommy isn't completely ruling it out.

"Not again," Tommy says.

They both know that he means it.

Given by the small spark that forms in his hand, they both know that he means that and them more. Tommy puts his hand behind his back, attempting to stop it from sparking. He can feel the sparks on his hand.

This is concerning, he's going to have to deal with this later.

He ignores the sparking and looks at Tubbo, who just looks... so incredibly tired.

Tubbo reaches up to brush his scar and flinches when he actually touches it. "I keep forgetting about it," Tubbo whispers, "They—" he cuts himself off and shakes his head. "Wanted to know about the rings, what I've found— I haven't fucking found anything yet and they still." There's a slight shake to his voice that wasn't there before. "I told them what I did know."

Tommy doesn't say anything, not for a moment, there's frankly not a lot that he can say.

Tubbo picks up the blanket again so it's higher, he's holding it so tightly his knuckles go white. Tommy's concerned to say the least.

"Can you get Ranboo?" Tubbo whispers.

It hurts a little, but that doesn't matter at the moment.

"I'm glad that you said what you knew about the fighters," Tommy says, "I'd rather you alive any day of the week."

Tubbo nods, "Can you get Ranboo?"

Tommy does.

He shakes Ranboo awake, and Ranboo looks up at him with eyes that are still half asleep. He must see the expression on Tommy's face, because almost straight away he seems to understand what Tommy is trying to say.

Ranboo makes some mumbled noises that sounds like an attempt of actually speaking, and he drags himself out of bed.

Tommy goes back to bed.

Where he does not sleep.

He just lays there with a pillow over his ears so that he can try and ignore Tubbo and Ranboo's voices. It doesn't go too well if he's being completely honest, instead he just tunes them out.

Focusing on the car outside is probably not his most effective method of trying to get to sleep.

But he thinks it works, because he blinks and then he can hear Purpled shuffling around and running into things. Probably his mattress on the floor, and various other boxes that will probably never get unpacked.

"Gonna build a fuckin' bedframe at this point," he mutters under his breath.

Tommy fumbles for his phone.

First thing he does is check that he has not been fired, that Techno has messaged him, or that Wilbur has not been cancelled.

When none of those things have happened, he decides the day is good enough and he gets out of bed.

Tommy's gonna need three things. Two of them are coffee, and one of them is to wonder why Purpled is hanging half out of the window in his vigilante gear.

They both look at each other for a moment.

"It's..." Tommy checks his phone, "Four forty three in the morning. What the fuck—"

"Patrol?" Purpled says slowly.

"The city is sleeping," Tommy argues.

"Yet here we are," Purpled argues, "I mean you can join me. The city is nice in the morning."

Tommy hesitates for a moment.

He begrudgingly puts on the mask and goggles, before pulling the Theseus hoodie over the shirt he slept in.

He hops around trying to put off his shoes, and Purpled just has his arms crossed laughing.

"Fuck off," Tommy mutters falling over his own feet and picking himself up off the floor. "I wasn't expecting to actually fucking go outside at four in the morning."

Purpled snickers a bit more.

Tommy rolls his eyes, shoving Purpled out the window.

Purpled yelps, but Tommy does some fancy hand movement he can't explain and he floats over to the building across from them.

Tommy jumps out the window, before catching his hands on the ledge of the building opposite him. Purpled grins, before purposefully putting his foot down right next to Tommy's fingers.

"Purpled, brother, help me," Tommy recites.

Purpled just smiles. "Long live the king."

Tommy lets go with both hands, before managing to grab onto the side of a fire escape, where he hauls himself back up so that he's glaring at Purpled.

Purpled can not see the glare, but Tommy hopes that he knows it's there.

With a sigh, Tommy looks out across L'Manberg. In the far distance he can see the water that surrounds L'Manberg, one of the only things keeping some people here. The boat fare, or plane ride.

He looks at Purpled, and Purpled looks back at him.

There's a sort of warm glow covering anything, it's still cold, the sun is only peeking over the horizon, but there's a glow to everything that you only get waking up this early.

Even Logstedchire looks beautiful in this light, he can hear some cars starting and some shops opening. There's light chatter if he strains his ears enough, no birds are chirping yet, but Logstedchire is coming to life.

Tommy knows that it'll get a lot busier soon, rush hour will start, people will be trying to get their kids to schools that might be across the island. It'll get loud, and the warm glow will disappear.

"It's nice to remind yourself," Purpled muses, "What we're fighting for... who we're fighting for."

"Our home," Tommy says breathlessly.

And... the word home somehow feels small enough that it can't describe everything he feels about Logstedhire. His apartment is home, being with Tubbo, Ranboo and Purpled is home. Being with Deo used to be home—

Logstedchire is perhaps the only constant, the only home that has always been his home and always been his home.

Maybe he's too tired to be thinking. He knows that down the street and to his left is his elementary school. And slightly further up is the high school he went to until he dropped out and went online at the ripe old age of twelve.

He knows the alleys, he basically grew up in them. He knows when Deo's apartment still is, no longer his, but he knows that there's a key that will still probably unlock the door under one of the floorboards.

Yeah... sometimes, just sometimes, Logstedchire makes it all worth it.

Purpled looks at him, before looking out back across Logstedchire. His mask moves in a way that implies he's pulling a face. "Something like that."

Tommy sits down, swinging his legs over the side of the building.

Some music would be nice, it would make an epic moment in his coming-of-age story, when he realises exactly what he's doing and why he's doing it. Apart from the fact that he's... known about this for a while.

“So,” Purpled says, as casual as ever. “We’re here for a reason.”

“We always are with you,” Tommy mutters.

Purpled stands up, before dragging Tommy to his feet.

Purpled hops over one of the gaps, and Tommy follows him. They keep on like this for a while, Purpled will find some new inventive way to hop gaps and Tommy will find an even better way to do it.

Eventually Purpled finds the building he must want, on the edge of Kinoko and Logstedchire, the sun is starting to rise in the sky a bit higher and the city is starting to come to life. He can hear more cars, and more apartments waking up and trains rattling.

Purpled walks over to the edge of this building, before crouching. Tommy has the urge to become a Spectre kinnie and shove him off the roof. Kindly enough he does none of these things, and instead crouches next to him.

The thing Purpled appears to be laser focused on isn't much of anything. It looks like a huge roller door that's on the side of a building.

Probably part of a shop that... just stores things, he supposes.

Tommy glances at Purpled, who doesn't even acknowledge him.

Oh okay that's odd.

Tommy looks back at the roller door.

There's a huge sloppily spray-painted purple flower on it. Like a flower a child draws, it's very sloppily done, that's for sure.

Purple flowers, this won't end well.

Purpled looks at Tommy, "It's a fuckin' purple flower. This has Elysium written all over it."

Tommy agrees wholeheartedly, he leans forwards slightly, as if that will adjust his eyesight. "Can you get in?"

Purpled rolls his eyes, "Who do you think I am."

He stands up, Tommy knows what he's about to do, he's done this thing for years. Purpled stands up on the edge of the building, before giving Tommy a two fingered salute.

And like the dramatic fucker he is, he drops off the side of the building and falls.

Tommy rolls his eyes.

Purpled taught him that trick, pretty rude of him to try to one up him. Tommy looks down the side of the building, his stomach lurches in a way that can not be healthy. He takes a deep breath.

He's in control right now.

He falls for a moment, before throwing his arms out in front of him.

The landing is not pretty, and Tommy falls over with a thump. “Don’t say a thing,” Tommy mutters as he stands up.

Purpled stands by the roller door, reaching down to the lock that connects it to the ground. He scowls slightly, before pulling out his gun.

“Too loud,” Tommy hisses.

“You fuckin’ do it,” Purpled mutters.

Tommy breaks the locking mechanism with a flicking movement and it falls apart on the ground.

Purpled glares, but he kicks the lock to the side before sliding open the roller door.

The noise it makes causes Tommy to wonder whether this is worth it. This might belong to someone who isn’t Elysium and then Tommy’s going to have to deal with the fallout of that. Both Theseus and Tommy are gonna have to cope with that.

Tommy checks over his shoulder, and then turns back to face the door.

It’s just... boxes of what looks like food lined up against the wall. On top of some boxes there’s some fresh produce and stuff, which is honestly a wise decision if Tommy’s being completely honest.

He squints at it all for a moment longer, before turning to Purpled.

“That’s odd,” Purpled remarks.

They step into the storage room, it really does just look like boxes. Most of them have what company they’re from, and all of them seem to add up enough that Tommy doesn’t have the urge to go looking around in them.

Something he does notice is that every box has a little flower in the middle of every side. Most of them are scrappily drawn, and probably were drawn half-heartedly by… well someone.

Tommy squats so he’s looking at one of the boxes closer.

Purpled hands him a knife with no hesitation, before turning to look back at whatever he was looking at.

Tommy cuts open the box. Inside said box is… boxes of cereal, just a lot of cereal. He picks some up and moves it around but there’s nothing wrong about the box. It is… just a lot of cereal. Like *a lot* of cereal, who the fuck needs this much cereal?

There’s the noise of Purpled flipping through papers, and Tommy looks up from the box.

Purpled’s standing at a desk which is almost completely covered by boxes. He’s holding a piece of paper in his hand. He slowly looks away from that and at Tommy, Tommy who is really fucking curious to say the least.

“What is it?”

“A note. From Elysium.”

“To?”

Purpled sighs, “This is what they wrote, ‘*we have recently heard about the shortage of food at the food bank, as a thank you from those who needed you most in times of trouble it is the least we can do.*’ Then it’s just a purple flower signed, like a stamp.”

Tommy snatches the piece of paper away from Purpled, scanning over it and— yeah that’s accurate.

“That doesn’t make sense,” Tommy says, “This goes against everything Elysium stands for.”

Purpled hums, “Does it? I mean no one really knows what Elysium stands for, apart from improving Logstedchire—”

“Oh.” They both say.

Tommy looks up from the paper.

They both rush over to the desk and start looking through the piles of paper, there isn’t a lot. But maybe on the off chance they can find something— the head of the organisation, any future plans.

“Do you know where... Redding Street is?” Purpled asks.

“Huh?”

“I dunno, looks like some sort of transfer of cash—”

“What the *fuck* ?” Someone says.

Someone who is not Purpled or Tommy.

Purpled turns around and has his gun from... wherever he keeps his gun. And points it at the person who's standing across from them.

It looks like... just some person, just a regular old lad standing there.

“What?” They say.

Purpled reaches up to his mask and apparently manages to turn on the voice modulator because when he speaks next his voice comes out all modulated and weird. Slightly deeper and distorted.

“Hi,” Purpled says, “We’ll just be on our way.”

“Why are... you and Theseus in my storage?” They say slowly.

“Fun,” Purpled replies easily. “We’ll be on our way now.”

Tommy slowly starts walking along the side of the room, Purpled follows after him.

Both Tommy and the person keep eye contact as they scoot out of there.

It's... well, it's awkward to say the least.

In their defence, what else are you supposed to do? They weren't exactly expecting to get caught, yet here they are.

Tommy waves to the person, before grabbing Purpled by the back of his hoodie and sending them both flying up towards the closest roof.

Tommy manages to land on the roof, and Purpled manages to catch himself on the edge of the roof. He hauls himself up. They both stand there for a moment, and Tommy looks across the building.

The person is still standing there, looking at them.

“Everything’s there!” Purpled yells.

Then they both move to the middle of the roof and sit down so the person on the ground can not see them.

“I can still see you.”

“Fuck!” Purpled says.

They hop a couple of buildings over, and Tommy keeps checking over his shoulder every three seconds. He’s not sure why, exactly, only that he does.

Purpled crouches down about three buildings away from their original building. He pulls out his phone.

Since when did Purpled bring his phone on patrol? That seems like a recipe for disaster.

Purpled must sense his distaste because he looks up at Tommy and sighs, “I’m going straight to work from here, I need my phone.”

“That seems dangerous.”

With a shrug, Purpled types something on his phone. “Do you know Redding Street?”

“No.”

“Like not even in Upper L’Manberg?” Purpled asks, “Because there aren’t any streets in Logstedchire with that name. It’s... confusing to say the least, what the fuck is going on?”

“Okay, okay,” Tommy says, shuffling in his spot a little. “What did the paper say?”

“It said there was a transfer of... a couple of thousand, addressed to some Redding Street— I don’t know a Redding Street, especially not in L’Manberg. If I type in Redding Street on my phone nothing useful comes up, there’s one in Texas?”

“So it was like a bank statement?”

“Yeah.”

“Surely they had bank numbers on them.”

“I dunno, I can’t remember. I just saw Redding Street then we were interrupted by getting fucking caught—”

“Oi!” Someone yells.

Tommy turns around, looking over his shoulder.

He is so grateful that neither Purpled or himself took off their masks and goggles. Purpled stands up a little straighter.

On the building across from them is... someone, they're wearing all black. They have a gas mask that only goes around their nose and mouth, and what looks like ski goggles on their eyes.

Tommy can see a mass of black hair, so at least he has some detail about who this person who apparently wants to kill them is.

Tommy stands up slowly.

This... is not looking good.

And they have a bow, that is really not looking good.

Purpled draws his own gun, but he doesn't point it yet, he just looks at the man.

"Theseus!" They yell.

That... no fucking way.

That's Nestorio. Same guy as from the warehouse—

Same guy who probably knows his real identity by now.

His stomach drops.

Purpled must sense something is wrong, because he steps in front of Tommy. Keeping his gun level at the other person's face.

“Who the fuck are you?” Purpled snaps.

“Nestor,” the man shoots back (not literally, thank fuck.) “And I’m here to tell you and Theseus to fuck off and mind your own business. We’ll handle our thing, you handle yours.”

“You’re trying to blow up heroes? Kill them?” Purpled says, “No offence— doesn’t seem very kind to me.”

Nestorio sighs, running a hand down his face. He can’t speak— what the fuck is happening. Why is Nestorio with Elysium? Is Nestorio with Elysium? What the fuck is happening— he needs to do something but he can’t—

“Look,” Nestorio continues, “I couldn't care less about how you go about your life, Theseus, I have a couple of issues with you— but not ones I don’t have with myself too.”

Purpled moves so he’s shielding Tommy completely.

“Stay away from Elysium!” Nestorio yells, “They took down Outwit, they can take you down easily.”

“Fuck off!” Purpled yells. “If the fuckin’ heroes can’t catch us, what makes you think that you will be able to—”

Tommy doesn’t take his eyes off of Nestorio and he grabs onto Purpled’s sleeve, pulling on it.

Purpled turns around.

Tommy shakes his head.

Purpled hesitates, looking back at Nestorio, then back at Tommy.

“Okay,” Purpled mumbles quietly. Then he turns back to Nestorio, and flips him off promptly. “Fuck you, we’ll do what we want!”

“Will you?” Nestorio challenges.

Purpled points his gun up at the man, there is not the slightest tremor there, and they both know that he’ll do it. He’ll do it with very little hesitation. Neither of them can see each other’s eyes, but there’s a way that they both hold themselves.

They both know the other one will do it.

Nestorio aims the bow higher.

“Back away,” Nestorio says, “Okay? Leave Elysium to do our thing, and we’ll leave you two to do— whatever you two do all day. You both do good work, but it’s not enough.”

“And killing heroes is?” Purpled yells.

Nestorio’s grip on the bow tightens slightly.

He lets go of the string.

Tommy throws his arm up, and pulls Purpled back by the back of his hood.

The arrow...falls apart in the air.

Before falling straight to the ground like it never had any momentum to start with. Tommy stares at the arrow for a moment.

He had not meant to do that—

What the everloving fuck?

Nestorio reaches behind him, obviously to grab another arrow.

There's a flash of red.

Tommy falls backwards, everything is warm.

Eventually he manages to look up, his head is fuzzy—

Purpled and Nestorio are staring at him, Tommy shakes his head, hoping that gets rid of some of the fuzziness. He can't think— what the fuck just happened? His ears are fucking ringing.

Nestorio takes a few staggered steps backwards, before dropping off the side of the building.

“Toms?” Purpled says, crouching down.

“What the fuck?” He manages.

“Could you... always do that?”

“Could I fuckin’ do what?” Tommy mumbles.

“Right. Okay... this is... going to be a problem,” Purpled mutters.

Tommy’s eyelids feel much heavier all of a sudden.

He feels himself go limp before he can warn Purpled.

Ah. Sucks to be Purpled.

Tommy wakes up, and that’s the first issue because he’s not even supposed to be fucking asleep.

Somehow he’s more tired than when he woke up, his eyelids are even heavier. All his limbs feel like they’re being weighed down by bricks. He’s on a pillow... he thinks, not some other sorta surface.

It’s probably fine, if it wasn’t... well he’d deal with that when he could actually move his limbs.

Wow, it has been a hot second since it got this bad.

He manages to look up.

This is... not his apartment, right, cool, this is a completely normal day with completely normal things like... Elysium, Purpled, Nestorio and Purpled being concerned—

“You awake, fucker?” Purpled’s voice manages to bring him back to focus on whatever this is.

Purpled pokes him in the cheek, “Techno, is he fucking dead?”

“I don’t fucking know,” Techno mutters, “Is he breathing?”

“Yeah.”

“Then it’s fine,” Techno mutters.

Tommy makes a noise, which isn’t much of anything. It’s just kinda garble, but his brain can not think of any better words to make. Apart from... the garble.

Purpled shrieks, “He’s turned into a zombie!”

“Purpled, calm down I swear to Prime—”

“There are sparks! He’s gonna fry me like a fuckin’ egg.”

“He’s not going to fry you like an egg— oh shit.”

Tommy manages to open his eyes properly. Purpled is peering at him, standing over him. Tommy yells and throws up one of his arms to shield his face that sends Purpled soaring across the room where he hits into the wall with a thump.

“Ow!” Purpled yells.

Techno rushes over, and sits Tommy up.

He's on a couch, probably Techno's apartment if he's being completely honest. Considering the small dog that is running around, the one and only Floof himself.

The dog, the myth, the legend.

Floof apparently decides now is the best time to jump up on Tommy's lap and decide that his leg is the ideal spot to close his eyes and sleep— at least one of them can sleep.

Purpled glares and appears to brush off his hoodie, he's changed into a black hoodie now, Tommy still has his Theseus gear on. Purpled sighs at Tommy, before flips him off. "Pretty rude to yeet me into a wall."

"Not the first time."

"Shut it," Techno mutters, he stands across from Tommy. Crossing his arms and leaning against the wall next to the TV. "Your powers really are glitching out, aren't they?"

"Yeah," Purpled mutters, "Uh... Tommy how long have you been able to like... make a flashbang?"

"Huh?" Tommy says quietly.

"CCTV cameras, and therefore local news stations caught you and Purpled arguing with... some unidentified figure on the roof, then there's this huge red flash and all the cameras in the local area go out," Techno explains, tilting his head towards the muted TV.

Where they appear to have some sort of power expert on. They play what is clearly Purpled and Tommy, and then a bright red flash and then there is no more footage. Which is... really fucking weird.

“Apparently it took out the power on that block,” Techno continues, “Tommy, what the fuck is happening?”

“I— don’t know,” Tommy looks down at his hands, that feel impossibly heavy. “I can’t sleep — my powers are just being weird, I don’t have to think about it anymore. I don’t... I don’t get it. It hasn’t done this before.”

“They’ve been getting stronger for a while,” Purpled remarks, “I mean you used to use a fucking baseball bat and a grappling hook when we first met, your powers would just... aid you. Now you fight almost solely with your powers, maybe this is like... the next evolution?”

“I’ve been able to control the progression though,” Tommy mutters.

Techno hums, “Imagine this. A floodgate is under an immense amount of pressure for... sixteen years.”

“Closer to ten—”

“Wait what?” Purpled says.

“So the floodgate,” Tommy says.

“Yeah,” Techno nods, “And there are bits that spill over the top, but you can catch those with buckets. Or in the basin, or— it’s manageable. And then the pressure gets too much, and the floodgate is starting to break.”

“You think this is the start of something?” Tommy asks, “My powers completely freaking the fuck out? What if I can’t control them— what if I hurt Purpled or you or—”

“Relax, relax,” Techno says, “Okay. I think I know where I can find people who can help you — and me.”

“You?” Tommy asks, “What’s wrong with you?”

“A lot,” Techno deadpans, he glances at Purpled. “The doctors don’t know how far the hybridness will progress. No one really does— but I think I can find some people who might know.”

Purpled fidgets in his spot for a moment. “Hey, Techno. Do you know a Reddings Street?”

Techno whips around so he’s looking at Purpled with enough force that he probably should’ve gotten whiplash. He opens his mouth, then closes it again.

Purpled doesn’t react, he’s obviously trying to get some tells out of Techno.

“Yes. I do.” Techno says through gritted teeth. “I’m surprised you don’t, either of you two. Especially if you’ve ever been involved with anything underground. Gangs, fighting rings, y’know the stuff.”

“Haven’t been involved in any of those,” Purpled says, arms crossed. “Where is it?”

“Not telling you,” Techno snaps, “I do not need two kids under my protection roaming around Reddings Street.”

“We are not under your protection—” Purpled snaps.

“We kinda are,” Tommy adds.

The look he gets from Purpled makes Tommy want to sink into the couch and disappear because, *holy fuck* when did he get that terrifying. Tommy swallows the terror and instead looks at Purpled.

“You two are not going to Reddings Street,” Techno says, and there’s some sort of finality to it that Tommy isn’t sure how to feel about it. “I might take Tommy there—”

“What the fuck?” Purpled yells, “Tommy and I are kinda a package deal here, Techno, you get one of us, you kinda have to deal with the other. He’s not anymore capable than me, what the fuck?”

“I don’t *want* to take Tommy there,” Techno says, “But it might be the only place where I can find someone with a power set similar enough to train him. Believe it or not, Tommy’s set of powers is pretty fucking rare.”

“You can’t just leave me out of this,” Purpled argues, “Tommy, tell him that he can’t leave me out of this. We found information about Elysium on Reddings Street, and I’m chasing this fucking lead. Do you want another Fundy incident? One that you know you could’ve stopped if you let me chase this lead.”

Techno raises his hand, which somehow shuts Purpled up.

“Purpled. Tommy,” Techno says, there’s not a lot of emotion on his face, but that’s not really new. “I know you both think you have to do everything by yourself, and for a while you have. But I am not letting either of you go to Reddings Street if I can avoid it, it’s hidden for a reason and I’m not comfortable with either of you two being in that environment.”

“What the fuck is there that’s so bad?” Purpled yells, “I mean— Tommy’s seen some shit, I’ve seen some shit. It’s probably not the worst we’ve ever seen.”

“I do not care,” Techno argues, “I don’t care what you’ve seen before, while I’m protecting you, I don’t want you to see bad things.”

“I’m not under your protection, asshole!” Purpled yells, “You don’t even like me.”

As much as Tommy loves watching his brother figures argue about this, he’s really not sure if he should let this continue. However, it appears that Purpled is filled with rage and Techno is being pretty understanding.

Maybe it’ll be fine as it is.

Tommy runs his fingers through Floof’s fur, he needs a bath. Like... quite badly too if he’s being completely honest.

“I like you just fine,” Techno replies.

“We’re not kids,” Purpled argues, “We can handle this!”

“But you don’t *have to*. ” Techno says easily, like he’s thought about this response for nights and nights and then some. “Just because you can handle something shouldn’t mean you have to.”

Everyone is silent for a moment.

“You two think you *have to* deal with whatever this is, I want to deal with this because... yeah,” Techno says. “Purpled.”

Purpled glares at Techno.

“I got this one, okay? Think of it as passing the ball to someone else for a bit, I’ll pass it back eventually.”

“Tommy?” Purpled says, “What do you think about this?”

Tommy sighs, running his fingers through Floof's fur and petting him. "I think... that we can't carry everything."

"You're fucking kidding me."

"I think..." Tommy says slowly, "That right now, we have enough going on. And there's only so much we can juggle."

Purpled opens his mouth, closes it again.

Then he picks his phone up off the table and stomps towards the door. "See you at home."

He opens said door, flings it open with a bit too much force. Then closes it with enough force that it shakes the apartment slightly.

Techno gives Tommy a look. "Is he always like that?"

"Yeah, kinda," Tommy shrugs, "He's fine. Just pissed that I didn't agree with him."

Techno nods. "So... should I have not let him record what you were saying in your sleep?"

Tommy's eyes go wide. "I was talking in my sleep?"

"Yeah," Techno gives a sly smile. "Talking about how much you love cows."

"No I fucking wasn't," Tommy hisses.

“A stuffed animal called Clem ringing any bells?”

Tommy’s stomach drops a little. Clem was the stuffed cow he had when he was... so much younger. Maybe around five. His parents gave him the cow, he managed to keep it for a while, and lost it a couple of years ago.

“Oh,” Tommy mutters. “Yeah...”

Techno pulls a confused face, before sighing. “Oh yeah, welcome to my apartment. Purpled brought you here. I think you scared him a lot, you just sorta— apparently fell.”

“Yeah.” Tommy mutters. “That’s... weird.”

“Get some sleep,” Techno says, “Next time I see you, you better have slept.”

“Sure.”

Tommy proceeds to... not sleep.

Again, this time it is not his fault.

Unlike this time, he is aware it is affecting how his brain is processing shit. He realises it particularly when Purpled throws a pillow at him. Tommy sees the pillow coming towards his face, he realises he has to react— and he doesn’t.

Purpled cackles with laughter.

Tommy is *so* fucking tired.

He doesn't realise how easy this is to see, until *Wilbur*. Mister "Theseus sounds like Tommy" realises that he is obviously not getting any sleep.

"Have you been sleeping?" Wilbur asks.

Tommy looks up from the coffee that is probably illegal to make, but the underpaid workers do *not* get paid enough to care about him. "Wha'?"

"Have you... slept? In the last like two weeks," Wilbur asks, "You're bein' all weird."

"I'm not bein' weird," Tommy manages, "You're bein' weird."

Wilbur actually looks concerned now. "Are you drunk?"

"Don't drink," Tommy mutters, "Tired. That's all." His words are slurring in a way that can not be healthy for anyone involved. He's surprised that Wilbur can understand anything he's saying because Tommy has no fuckin' clue what he's saying.

Wilbur just gives him a look.

"Don't worry, I'm so awake that I'm gonna fuckin' kill Philza. I'm gonna fry a chicken if ya pickin' up what I'm puttin' down. Fucker kicked me and now I'm gonna kick him right into a deep fryer."

"Tommy, what the fuck?" Wilbur says, "What do those words even mean?"

"Fuckin' schnitzel lookin' ass—"

“What did Phil even do to you? He’s been nothing but nice.”

“So one night—”

Tommy hears a screech and Techno barrels out of his office.

That pretty effectively derails the conversation.

Wilbur looks at Techno with a judgemental look. “Why the fuck are you screeching like some sort of banshee?”

“Uh—” Techno looks at Tommy,

There’s a long moment of silence, where Techno and Wilbur just make aggressive eye contact, neither of them girlboss harder than the other.

“Spider.” Techno eventually manages, “Saw a— spider, yeah. That’s what happened. Nothing else.”

“You’re being weird,” Wilbur says.

“I am not being weird.”

“Are too!” Wilbur argues, “You’ve been acting all weird. Tommy’s acting weird, but he hasn’t slept in like three days.”

“Four,” Tommy adds. “Four days, my body is going brrr.”

“What the fuck does that even mean—”

“Electricity in my veins,” Tommy whispers like it’s a secret. “Imma fry you like an egg. Crack, boil and sizzle. Does Philza eat eggs, is he a traitor to all of— egg kind. Wait, am I egg kind? I don’t wanna be egg kind. Eggs are weak, I am not.”

Wilbur looks at Tommy, then at Techno. “Can you knock him the fuck out?”

Techno looks at Tommy. “I mean I probably could—”

“I will fry you like an egg,” Tommy promises.

They both know that he’ll find a way to do it. Techno instead looks slightly more nervous than before and shakes his head. “Nah... you heard the kid, he’ll fry me like an egg. Something that I’d rather not happen.”

“Coward,” Wilbur snaps. “Tommy go the fuck to sleep, just have some sleeping tablets and call it a day—”

Tommy stands up, and goes to attack Wilbur.

Bastard, he can’t fucking— he will not be going down the route, not again. He goes to bring a spark in his hand and then fuck up Wilbur’s day with that. But apparently that’s ‘mean’ and he can’t do that.

Tommy goes to swing at Wilbur.

The audacity of this British fuck—

Techno apparently knows him better than he gives credit for, because Techno stands between Wilbur and Tommy. He puts a hand on Tommy's shoulder, and Tommy finds himself pretty stuck to move.

Okay what in the—

“No!” Tommy yells, “No sleepin’ pills.”

“Okay, okay,” Techno says evenly, “No sleeping pills.”

“Mhmm,” Tommy nods his head, “No— none of that. Not in this house blessed by Prime themself— himself? Herself? Themselves. What’s the gender neutral?”

“ *The* gender neutral?” Techno repeats with a smile.

Techno’s just being patroninising— patroneeing— patronising, there it is. Patronising, like a parent would. And Techno is not a parent he is a regular man who does regular things like... being regular and dumb.

Men are dumb. What do they even do for... the economy. Or what else can people do— make more people? Ew, Tommy does not want to be thinking about that. Tommy sighs and falls back onto the couch, before dramatically sighing.

He’s having a terrible time and needs everyone else to know about it.

Why? You may ask, that’s an excellent question. One that Tommy does not know the answer to, not one even in the slightest. Now that he thinks about it, he doesn’t know a lot about anything.

All he knows is... yeah that’s about where that list ends.

He is tired, he does know that and he needs a nap. But at the same time a nap means dreams and dreams mean he becomes all sad because his life is all sad. Then he has to deal with that sadness, like his parents being dicks, and he's done with still thinking about his parents.

His parents sucked and now he thinks about them all the time, about things he knows wasn't his fault. About how he learnt their footsteps when they wanted to barge into his room or just walk past, or how Tommy learnt to sneak around because footsteps let them knew where he was and he couldn't let them know where he was otherwise the yelling would start and yelling never lead to anything good.

The yelling leads to hands being raised, and that leads to Tommy being in pain. And Tommy's sick of being in pain— and he doesn't even know why he's thinking about this, his parents are long gone and have been for a long time and he still fucking misses them because of course he does.

“Stop thinking of them,” Tommy says.

Techno looks at him. “Tommy?”

“Shut.”

Techno shuts.

Tommy misses his parents.

Well, he doesn't. His parents sucked, he knows that they sucked. He's well aware of that fact, it's not like he likes them. But he misses them in a way he can't explain, it almost hurts him how much he misses them. They were awful to him, they never did anything but hurt him— normally on purpose.

And he misses them.

He just... misses them.

For the good moments and the terrible moments.

He just misses them a lot. All the time.

He's never slowed down enough to think about it, but his sleep deprived brain must know what's good for him because now it's all that he's thinking about.

People used to say he looked like his dad, and Tommy wonders if they'd still think that about them now. With Tommy's slightly ratty hair, that's a mess at best and awful at worst. His dad had very neat hair, neat blond hair that's now his.

His mum... was also blonde but a darker shade, closer to Dream's than Tommy's. And she somehow had kind eyes, despite the fact that Tommy had seen them look at him before knocking him to the floor. Everytime Tommy looked at her, he'd wonder if this was the time she'd save her.

It never was.

"Are my eyes kind?" Tommy asks the room.

The room has been silent as he's been thinking, at least... that's what he assumes. It may have been less than silent. He really doesn't know, but he's going to assume that it's been quiet because of course it has.

"Pardon?" Wilbur says.

He's sitting down on the couch across from him, with concerned eyes.

Wilbur's eyes aren't kind as such, they're soft. Not kind. He thinks the difference is worth mentioning.

"Are my eyes—" Tommy yawns, "Kind."

Wilbur looks at him for a long moment. "Not really. I don't look at your eyes and think they're kind... I look at your eyes and think..."

"Analytical," Techno adds, "Tired."

"Huh," Tommy mutters. "Y'know I look like my dad? And 'pparently use'ta carry myself like my ma?"

"Nope," Wilbur says. "You don't talk about your parents a lot."

"Good," Tommy snaps, "Fuckin' assholes. Hate 'em."

Techno shuffles in his seat, "Sometimes I miss my parents. They were never kind to me, not after the ring, they didn't really like me much before. I still miss them. But that's okay, I'm allowed to miss them. They were important to me, for all of their... mistreatment. Just because they treated me badly doesn't mean I don't care about them."

Wilbur laughs, "Therapy helping then?"

"A lot." There's no humour behind it.

"I don't miss them," Tommy lies. "I miss—I don't miss them. They hurt me."

Wilbur goes to sit up, but Techno keeps him in place. Tommy doesn't notice this.

"I'm sixteen, I just want my parents."

"Wait, what—"

Techno makes a noise in the back of his throat.

"I'm a kid." Tommy says to the ceiling. "What am I doing?"

"Wait, can we circle back to the whole—"

"Wilbur, shut it."

Wilbur shuts it.

Tommy stares at the roof. "Wilbur."

"Tommy."

"I gotta tell you something," Tommy says solemnly, "And you gotta promise not to be mad."

"I—" Wilbur starts.

Techno stands up.

He picks up the coffee table and throws it at one of the windows. The window doesn't break, but the glass coffee table does.

Wilbur screeches. "Why the fuck do you hate glass coffee tables?"

"That was so weird," Techno says looking at the broken coffee table. "I was just overcome with the blinding urge to throw the coffee table at the window. Must be a piglin thing."

"I don't think you can pull that card whenever you do something weird—"

"Piglins are so weird," Techno says. "Well Wilbur, help me clean that up and not talk to Tommy. Sorry Tommy."

"s okay," Tommy mumbles.

"Techno are you okay?" Wilbur asks as he stands up. "You've been acting really weird today ___"

Tommy closes his eyes.

He thinks he sleeps, because the next thing he remember is him sitting up and his hands shaking.

Techno is sitting on an armchair, with a laptop. He looks mad at the laptop, or just confused.

He looks up at Tommy before closing the laptop and putting it on a coffee table that looks very different.

It's not glass.

What did Tommy miss?

"You feelin' alright?"

His hands are shaking and his heart is thudding in his chest from a dream he can't remember.

"Huh?" He mutters.

Techno just smiles, and it's fond enough that Tommy can't help but crack a small smile back.

Tommy looks at his shaking hands then back at Techno. "What's the last dream you had?"

"Uh..." Techno appears to think for a long moment before eventually opening his mouth again. "It was about you, actually. We were running from— I think it was a giant car, maybe Lightning McQueen. Then you fell over and Phil picked you up and he flew with you."

"Oh." Tommy mutters. "I had a dream a couple of days ago that I was falling. Then— a dog was also falling with me. Then I could save the dog or myself, I dunno how, and I think I chose the dog."

"That feels like a metaphor and a half, if I was an English major I'd analyse the hell outta that."

"Wouldn't psychology be more around interpreting dreams."

"I dunno, I'm not an English major or a psychologist."

The elevator doors slide open and Dream steps out of the elevator, carrying a barking Floof.

Behind him is Quackity who is holding his arm.

"I have a gift for you." Dream says, "Dog."

"Where the fuck have you been?" Techno stands up and takes Floof out of Dream's arms. "I thought you were pesterin' Phil."

A moment later a door flings open and Sapnap is standing there panting.

"Whatever they say—" he pauses to breathe a bit more. "Is lies and slander."

What is happening?

"You gave a dog a rocket launcher!" Quackity yells, "Then the dog tried to bite me when I took it off him."

This feels like a bad dream. Like his brain has no creativity.

"It was funny!" Sapnap argues. "Floof can't use it—"

Techno looks at Floof and sighs. "You're lucky you're really cute, or you'd be in trouble."

Maybe sleeping would be less confusing than this.

"You gave a literal animal a rocket launcher!" Quackity yells. "What the fuck is wrong with you?"

"What's wrong with me? I have a sense of humour, everything was fine."

"What if it wasn't?"

Tommy's getting some— how do you say this. *Vibes*. Some slightly fruity vibes at that, especially with the extreme amount of eye contact they're giving each other.

It feels like they're intruding.

"I'll make you fine in a minute," Sapnap snaps and Quackity just glares a little bit harder. "Oh no, you're already fine."

Quackity somehow glares a bit harder. "I am going to hit you."

Sapnap opens his mouth and Dream must know him quite well because he slaps his hand over Sapnap's mouth.

"And we will be going—" Dream smiles widely. "Sapnap, behave. Quackity... we should probably get your arm fixed."

"I'll go!" Sapnap says, "Don't you wanna spend more time with me? Your favourite person?"

Quackity glares.

"Cute that you think that was a choice!" Sapnap grabs Quackity's other arm and drags him towards the elevator.

Quackity goes surprisingly easy.

The elevator closes leaving Dream, Techno and Tommy.

"Anyone gettin' a vibe."

"Nah," Dream says. "They've been like that for year's. If you *really* wanna pick up some vibes watch them in interviews with— that reporter... what's his name?"

"Karl? CNL's dude," Techno says slowly. "What about him? He's a pretty chill dude y'know. Just sorta vibing."

"One time in an interview he asked Quackity about relationships and I have never seen anyone go quite that red."

Techno wheezes.

Tommy... well he doesn't do much, instead he turns to face the other side of the couch and closes his eyes.

Again, he thinks he sleeps. Nothing else makes a lot of sense.

He's not sure, but he wakes up to quiet voices.

He doesn't move, and for a moment he can just pretend he's sleeping even when he's just not.

Maybe that'll give him energy.

"Why are you even trying to find your freaky hybrid friends—"

"Don't call him that," Techno snaps and he types more aggressively. "He's the one who got me out, I owe him a lot."

"He's like a full wither hybrid."

"Wither *skeleton* the difference is important," Techno appears to have a lot of venom in his tone, and honestly... pop off king.

"Do you even know if he's alive?"

Techno pauses. "Hopefully more alive than Fruit and Squid."

"Who?"

"Photo on my desk," Techno mutters. "Chat, shut the fuck up. I reckon I'll find him on Reddings."

Tommy sits up, rubbing at his eyes.

Techno closes his laptop. "It awakens."

Tommy goes to throw a pillow at him. But he can't pick it up, or throw it right because it falls onto him.

With a groan, Tommy buries his head into the pillow.

His head is still fuzzy and none of this thoughts are together in any capacity apart from just... incoherent screaming.

Tommy grins sleepily, before looking at Wilbur, peering out from under the pillow. He probably looks like a child.

"Wil." Tommy says. "Pst, Wilbur."

"Hi."

"Psssst, Wilbur," he whisper yells. "Guess wha' happened at the gala?"

Wilbur pales, but Tommy pays it no mind. Just a pasty man, Wilbur is, he should go outside way more than he does.

In fact— Tommy has seen Wilbur outside at day like four times. This must mean that Wilbur is a vampire.

Hahaha, vampirebur.

Vamp-boi.

Wilbur would be a terrible vamp-boi, he'd be too much boi and not enough vamp. Tommy laughs into his pillow. Vamp-boi is simply the funniest thing that has been said since the 'vigilante kicking off a roof' gag.

That's not even a gag. That was a mildly traumatic experience.

But at the same time, imagine being kicked off a roof. Tommy is such a loser. He should get ratio-ed on twitter.com.

He's gonna ratio himself on twitter.com and no one can stop him. Apart from Techno... and Purpled, and Tubbo, even Ranboob would stop him. Or Wilbur, or even Dream. Phil would not, Tommy is too much of a girlboss without the girl for Phil. The bestest girlboss to ever girlboss.

He should gaslight— everyone.

How does one gaslight everyone?

Oh wait, he was gonna tell Wilbur about the gala—

Yeah. Gala.

"At the gala," Tommy says, looking at Wilbur from under the pillow. Wilbur looks like a vamp-boi—

Vamp-boi!

Wait no. Gala. No vamp-boi, only gala.

"I saw this dude there," Tommy whispers like it's a secret. "I was snoopin' and then he got all not pog about it. Then he pointed a gun at my spine, and called for someone ta get ya."

"W—what?"

"Bullet to the spine!" Tommy says cheerfully. "Lucky my spine is squishy, like a sponge. It would just bounce back! Like Slimecicle— I haven't seen that dude in forever."

Tommy's mouth falls open and he looks at Wilbur.

"DID YOU KIDNAP SLIMECICLE? I WILL NEVER FORGIVE YOU, YOU KIDNAPPED SLIMECICLE!"

"No one kidnapped Slimecicle," Wilbur says through gritted teeth. "All of the Logstedchire Four are fine."

"Ha, name goes brrr. Theseus is a shit name for a vigilante—"

Techno freezes, but slowly gets out his phone.

"Stupid name for a stupid vigilante. They're resigning him to Theseus's fate, bein' pushed off a cliff or somethin' and dyin'. I can't have him dyin' that would greatly inconvenience me. And I'm too cool."

Techno is laughing silently in the corner, Tommy pays the over-glorified bacon no mind.

"Like Aurelian? Cool as shit name, literally the fucking coolest! Slimecicle? Cool name as well, very poggers of them. Very, very poggers. Purpled? Dumb fuckin' name for a dumb fuck. Theseus— aaargh."

Techno is currently struggling to breathe and Wilbur is laughing too which is good because Wilbur is not a vigilante stan.

"I can think of three names better off the top of my head. Uhhh— Atlas, that's a cool name. Incommodus, that's Latin. Crimson Bitch, anything is better. Like who decided that name, I

wanna talk about it. Just wanna talk, and then I'll beat them up! Wow, kapow, call it a day. I wanna be called— Chaos Man."

"If you were a vigilante?" Wilbur laughs. "You'd wanna be Chaos Man."

"Mhmm, better name than fuckin' Purpled at least. After a *colour* really? A bad colour at that, evil colour for an evil man."

Techno wheezes even harder.

Tommy mutters his hatred of the name Theseus under his breath a bit more because he honestly thinks he's earned it.

What a shit name.

Eventually Techno and Wilbur manage to stop laughing and Tommy is left glaring at the ceiling like they were the one who bestowed Tommy's name upon him.

Can Tommy try to rebrand?

"Such a scam, because ain't Elysium, the concept, Greek?"

"Yeah." Techno says.

"Well now he's associated with Elysium," Tommy groans, "And that's not good, because you fuckers see a coincidence and insist it's intentional because ya all fuckin' stupid."

Techno and Wilbur exchange a glance.

"Specially you, Wilbur. Stupid."

"Um— okay?"

"So fucking stupid," he says fondly. "Like Floof! There is not a single thought behind that dog's eyes and I love him for it. Where is Floof? I need my Floof."

He looks at Techno with pleading eyes.

"Techie—"

"Absolutely fucking not."

"Techie—"

"This is not a thing we're starting. Techno or Tech are acceptable, none of this Techie stuff."

Tommy looks at Techno and frowns. At this point he doesn't care what he calls Techno, he will however cry on command.

He cries on command.

It doesn't work, because Techno just looks at him.

Fuck. Techno has progressed past being guilt tripped with Tommy's fake crying.

Wilbur has not.

He hits Techno in the arm. "Don't be mean to Tommy."

"If he's calling me Techie, I'm calling him Tom-Tom or something fucking stupid. The guilt trip won't even work because fucker would do this if he was wide awake."

"I hate you." Tommy murmurs. "You are my least favourite member of the Salty Bitches Incorporated."

"That's not what that—"

"You're my least favourite brother figure."

Techno pauses. "I'm a brother figure?"

"Yeah, my fuckin' least favourite one too," Tommy mutters, throwing a pillow at him which Techno catches easily.

"I'll be back." Techno says.

He leaves promptly after.

Welp— Techno's mad at him. Well, maybe just upset. Wait. Didn't he say around Swinter that Tommy was like family? Does that mean Techno isn't upset, because Tommy does not need to be on his character arc where Techno hates him again. That was a solid 0/10 would not try again.

Wilbur snickers. "He's probably crying."

"Like... slash pos?"

"Excuse me?"

"Slash pos. Colon, capital 'D'."

"Why are you doing this—"

"Capital X, capital D."

"Who hurt you?"

"Capital T, dash, Capital T."

Wilbur stares at him for a very long moment. "The actual fuck is wrong with you?"

"Capital D, apostrophe, colon."

Wilbur throws a pillow at him and Tommy screeches. He screeches like a fucking banshee as Wilbur walks over to him with a pillow and raises it above his head.

Then he hits it against Tommy's head, ifting it up again and hitting him.

Tommy— he squeals, not that he'd ever admit it. But he squeals and laughs so hard his side hurts as Wilbur just hits him with the pillow repeatedly.

Until it's basically just Tommy curled in a ball as Wilbur hits him with a pillow.

The elevator opens.

Wilbur pauses his attack and Tommy looks up from his arms where he's protecting his head.

It's Philza. His soon-to-be saviour.

"Phil!" Tommy screeches, "Phlllllll, Wilbur's hurtin' me. Philza, save me, he's gonna kill me."

Wilbur drops the pillow. "Dad— would *I*, Wilbur Soot, ever hurt Thomas Underscore? Like name a single time."

Tommy goes to open his mouth.

Wilbur picks up the pillow and hits him with it.

"Like name a time."

"Leave the ch— leave Tommy alone. Stop bullyin' the child."

"I have kicked your ass, Mister Philza," Tommy says. "Respectfully shut the fuck up, you're old."

Phil's mouth falls open.

"Henry says he's had five hours of sleep over four days. Three of those are today."

Phil's mouth opens, and he looks outraged.

"No—" Wilbur says, "You are not—"

"Excuse me, Wil," Phil says, he starts walking around. He pushes the coffee table out of the way and starts putting the couch cushions and blankets on the ground.

"You are not—"

"I'm not making a nest," Phil says while ripping apart a couch to add it to his pile. "It's a harmful and dehumanising assumption about avian hybrids—" he takes a pillow Tommy was laying on and adds it to the pile. "Not once have I made a nest."

Phil keeps making his nest.

Tommy sits up so his couch can be taken apart for nest purposes.

Phil takes his couch apart for nest purposes.

"Henry," Wilbur sighs. "Can someone bring up pillows and blankets to our floor?"

"Already done, *Soot*. "

"What's with the sass?" Wilbur asks. "Why am I arguing with an AI— Henry, thank you very much."

"Okay, *Wilbur*. "

Wilbur screws up his face. "Henry, this is bold for someone who recorded me being outsmarted by a dog yesterday—"

"Huh—"

"Nevermind!" Wilbur grins.

Henry, surprisingly, stays quiet. Which is unlike him, Henry is a little bitch. Sure a cool bitch, and one that got him his job. But Henry is a fucking snitch.

If Henry went to school everyone would hate him. Yes, Henry is a king. And yes, Henry is a bitch and a snitch. Those are two statements that should co-exist.

Does Henry even use he/him pronouns? Has Tommy been misgendering Henry this entire time—

"Henry, buddy, pal o' mine."

"Yes, Thomas?"

"What're ya preferred pronouns?"

"I am an AI, therefore do not adhere to the same systems. However I was created with a masculine voice and name, so most use he/him."

"Thank you king." Tommy says. "A legend— an icon, you are *the moment*. I thought I understood what an icon was, then I met you. The most iconiest of icons. Philza pales in

comparison—"

Phil chirps.

And Tommy would love to lie, to say that his brain didn't start failing. But that's just a lie, he simply can not say that.

It's difficult to put into words what Tommy thinks at this moment, but this is pretty close:
AHHHHHHH BIRBBIRBBIRB AHHHH BIRD, BIRD, CHIRP, BIRB.

Tommy chirps, just a small thing at the back of his throat that he can't suppress.

Phil looks at him with wide eyes.

"Dad— you can't go full bird. And he's gone full bird, cool."

"Birb," Tommy says helpfully.

Wilbur laughs and raises an eyebrow. "Birb?"

Tommy nods seriously, "Birb—"

His thoughts are basically just a lot of screaming and the word birb. He really thought he was past this, and had been for a long time. But *nooo* one avian hybrid chirps at him and now he's a mess.

Birb.

Bird is such a lame word, birb however? That does work, that's the bestest word in the world. The multiple noises, the sheer joy of the word being birb and not some stupid shit like bird.

Birb is a good word.

Bird? Bad word, evil word. Tommy hates it with a *passion* because he's just built *that* different.

"What the fuck—" Techno says, apparently having just returned, "Why is Phil making a—"

"Not a nest!" Phil yells, and keeps on making his nest.

"Tommy chirped," Wilbur grins, "And now both Dad and him are in bird mode."

"Oh no—" Techno takes a step back, "I am not getting trapped in the not nest again."

"I think you'll find you are," Phil says.

"Phil, we all got stuff to do."

Phil glares and moves a pillow around experimentally, before screwing up his face and moving it back. "No you don't."

"Phil—"

Wilbur turns to Techno, putting a hand on Techno's shoulder. "Come on, no one ever chirps at him. Quackity can't even chirp, let him have this."

Techno rolls his eyes, “You used to chirp.”

“That was not a chirp,” Phil says, “That was... Wilbur.”

“It was totally a chirp,” Wilbur whips around. “Just not your kinda chirp you—” he cuts himself off and looks at Tommy. “It was just a different chirp.”

“Quirky.” Tommy adds, “You’re not like other avian hybrids.”

“Not an avian hybrid,” Wilbur says softly.

Tommy squints, “What’s the genetics? Phil’s ya dad.”

Wilbur laughs, “I’m adopted, Tommy.”

Tommy’s mouth falls open. “I was adopted once, not like *proper* because yeah, but that was good. They were nice to me, and then everythin’ went wrong because it always go wrong because I can’t have shit in L’Manberg.”

“You were adopted?” Techno says.

Tommy flops onto the pillow pile. He is living here now, everyone else can work around him. He’s very tired.

“Not like *proper*. ” Tommy murmurs into the pillow. “The people of Logstedchire see one underfed child and then boom, you’re adopted. Sure they’re in a gang or whatever—”

“Excuse me?” Wilbur says.

“Grow up,” Tommy says, “Other option was the street, they saved me.”

“Right. Okay,” Techno says.

“Wait— didn’t you say you were sixteen earlier?”

Phil whips around, looking at Wilbur with widened eyes. “He said what?”

“I’m sixteen,” Tommy says into the pillow. “Old news.

“You’re— what?” Phil says.

Wilbur yells, “You’re sixteen? *Huh*. What the fuck— you’re a literal child. I told a child to have alcohol. Oh no. You’re sixteen—”

Techno sighs, “I’m not even gonna try to cover for you.”

“You knew?”

Techno sighs. He doesn’t say anything.

“I’m sixteen and I need a nap,” Tommy states.

Which... is a fair assumption, everyone must decide. Because Wilbur flops onto the not-nest pile next to him.

Phil is the next one to relent to the not-nest because he lays down next, and puts a wing so it's covering both Tommy and Wilbur. Tommy laughs slightly as the wing covers his back and Phil just looks at him.

Phil chirps.

Tommy chirps back.

Techno sighs, before laying between Wilbur and Tommy.

Wilbur glares, and kicks him in the side.

Techno shuffles out from the wing and moves so he's no longer lying between Wilbur and Tommy. He grumbles under his breath, before settling and staying silent and quiet.

The wing that's draped over the three of them is pretty big, but Tommy's legs still stick out the bottom. As does Wilbur's. Tommy's pretty sure Techno's curled up into a ball, but it's pretty hard to see with a dark wing that's making everything a bit hard to see.

Tommy closes his eyes, and Phil shuffles slightly.

It's peaceful here.

Safe.

Something in the back of his brain screams about safety. That he's longed for some safety for such a long time, and *this* feels like safety. Phil knows what he's doing, and Phil will protect Tommy.

Techno will protect both Theseus and Tommy.

He... thinks he's safe here, if only for a while.

So he curls up slightly more and shuts his eyes a bit tighter. The weight of Phil's wing on his back is almost like a blanket. It's... peaceful, it's safe and Tommy can feel the invisible weights on his shoulders disappear.

He's tired.

Wilbur's fingers run through the ends of his hair.

"Your hair is knotty," Wilbur whispers.

"Didn't have time to brush it," Tommy whispers back.

Wilbur hums, before apparently trying to get through a particularly bad tangle. Tommy is pretty sure there's leaves in his hair that he didn't get sorted out from... who knows where. It's been a long time since he's brushed his hair.

"You should brush your hair more," Wilbur muses, "It's a miracle half of your hair is alive."

He washes it at least.

Tommy's eyes flutter closed, as Wilbur tries to 'brush' his hair as well as he can while both of them are laying down and there's no brush.

"You're pretty cool," Tommy manages.

Wilbur laughs, with enough fondness that Tommy smiles at that too.

“He isn’t,” Techno whispers, “Now shut the fuck up, I’m trying to sleep.”

Tommy shuts the fuck up, and closes his eyes. It doesn’t feel like electricity is keeping him awake anymore, he’s just warm... and safe.

He falls asleep.

And for once he has dreams that he wants to remember.

Chapter End Notes

tinaaos tommy when:



Also I have a doc with [every single TINAAOS summary](#) just in case people want that!

Chapter Summary:

- Tubbo goes to the doctor, doctor is concerned
- No one sleeps because Tubbo's having nightmares, Tommy's powers are also going *BRRRR*
- Purpled drags him out to an early morning patrol to hijack an Elysium thing. It's just food for a food drive. They get caught and fuck off, Nestor shows up, they talk a bit. Tommy's powers create a huge light and then he passes out
- At Techno's (after passing out) Purpled argues with Techno and leaves pissed because Tommy doesn't agree with him
- Tommy is sleep deprived. That's most of the rest of the chapter. Phil chirps. Tommy chirps back so Phil makes a nest. He talks about his parents and reveals that he's 16.
- Nap time in the nest.

WATER FANART:

No context, gotta be in the discord fellas. (Even if ur in the discord you might not know)

[Purpled @ Wilbur](#) done by Pixel!

Purpled being a [chaos king with a drink bottle](#), and [Tommy and Phil as eggs](#) by Clay!

[Our king of hydration](#), then [yelling at Tommy](#) both drawn by the lovely Marina!

[Quackity vs. Floof](#) drawn by Aza (this is so funny istg)

These super cool [tommy & theseus doodles](#) by [Mauttz](#)

[This piece](#) by Pistol, which made my cry laugh

[P1tsk3](#) drew [Theseus getting kicked off the roof](#) (L)

THIS AMAZING PIECE DONE BY KEI! (warnings for blood) Based on the [More Acts of Spite oneshot](#) (not canon) where Purpled betrays Tommy

[tina!Tubbo art](#) which I FUCKING ADORE OMG OMG AWHUDSNJ /pos drawn by [Al](#)!

[Cef](#) drew [Wilbur on the skydeck](#)! Which is super cool!

In Which Tommy McFucking Snaps || Part 1 ||

Chapter Summary

angst, angst, ouch, fluff, greek myths, fluff, fluff, angst.
summed up the chapter, don't have to read now.

or.

tommy deals with the aftermath of last chapter, techno is mad about heracles vs. hercules and wilbur gets some empathy skills. also schlatt is here, and tubbo is an angst goblin. ranboo is surprisingly rational and encourages violence.

Chapter Notes

Hi guys! Welcome back. Today I have a long chapter for you, which went way out of hand. So that's why it took so long. Hopefully it's worth it.

Warnings: knives, medical stuff (including mentions of blood tests), hospitals, eating & food, some arguing and yelling, implied/referenced child abuse

Let me know if I've missed anything, as I've forgotten most of this chapter and I'll add it as quickly as possible!

As always chapter summary at the end <33

TIKTOKS:

We've had a huge influx of Tiktoks recently, so thanks for that!

[Ripplee](#) my beloved with a [Purpled & Tommy](#) one

A heap by [Coolkidsstuff](#) including (but not limited to:) [Netflix Deals](#) & [Tommy not giving a fuck](#)

[Nadine](#), [throwing hands over chapter 28](#) (all /lh)

[This one](#) that made me laugh wayyy too hard by [Sero](#)

[Beloved art](#) by [Starstar](#)

[Floof & Techno tiktok](#) by [Astrid](#)

[Greek_Myth](#) did [this one that made me CHUCKLE](#)

These are here because the end notes are sadly too long as it is!

Enjoy the chapter!!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Do you ever have the feeling that you've fucked up?

Like completely and wholly, that there is nothing you can possibly do that will backtrack this moment to one of salvation? When you realise that you've dropped everything down the drain and now it's going out to sea?

Yeah... Tommy's real fucking familiar with that feeling.

It happens at about two in the morning.

Tommy's about to go back to sleep after drifting out of sleep, if only for a moment.

He realises.

"WILBUR KNOWS," he yells, sitting up.

This wakes up Purpled with a start, who must think there's an intruder because he grabs a knife from under his pillow (what the fuck?) Before pointing it at the window, then scanning

around the room before just looking at Tommy with a deadpan expression.

“No way,” Purpled says, “Why the fuck were you yellin’?”

“Wilbur knows,” Tommy scrambles out of bed and grabs his phone.

The words appear to sink into Purpled’s brain because his face drops completely. “Okay, so the easiest way out of the country is obviously on a boat, I think I know a guy that I can pay off. Have some connections in America, which is obviously where you’d have to go—”

“—That I’m sixteen,” Tommy adds.

Purpled’s face drops again, but this time with slightly more murderous intent.

“Oh I am going to stab you,” Purpled launches himself at Tommy and they both land on the floor. Purpled grabs a pillow from his mattress (that still does not have a bedframe, it’s on the list of things to do— Tommy swears.)

He then hits Tommy with the pillow several times, before calling it a day and flopping back onto his mattress.

Purpled falls asleep literally five seconds later. (Tommy fucking counts. It’s five seconds, not a moment longer.)

He snores, and Tommy rolls his eyes.

Somewhat reluctantly he manages to get the blanket out from under Purpled and throw it over him. Purpled doesn’t react, which isn’t too much of a shock. Tommy sighs and picks up one of the pillows on the floor before throwing it at Purpled.

Eventually he manages to gain the courage to peek at his phone.

Wannabe Theatre Kid:

Tommy

Tommu

*Tommy

Tommy

We should probably talk

Being honest Techno and you should probably talk too

I think he might've known tho

Clever bastard

Well... respond when you see this

Tommy stares at the messages, before closing his eyes and sighing. How the fuck is he even supposed to think about handling this.

His phone buzzes, and Tommy looks down.

It's an unknown caller ID.

Now Tommy has two options, one is the obvious one. Don't pick it up because why the fuck would he even think of doing that, it's so unbelievably stupid that it's not fucking funny. People could trace where he lives, or scam him out of his valuable twitter.com followers—

He picks up the call.

“Hello, this is Tommy speaking, how can I help you?”

“Is Tubbo okay?”

And that is... Schlatt.

At two in the fucking morning, right. Right. Okay then. Normal day for the Tommy community, why the fuck is Schlatt calling him at— okay?

“What the fuck?” Tommy manages in his tired tone.

“I need to talk to Tubbo right now.”

“The fuck ya don’t,” Tommy snaps, “How did you even get my new number—”

“Don’t worry about it,” Schlatt says and Tommy immediately starts worrying. “Tubbo learnt what he knows from someone— where the fuck is Tubbo?”

“In bed?” Tommy says, swinging the door open. “Because it’s fucking two in the morning and some of us are sane.”

“I’ve met you and Tubbo, I highly doubt anyone in that house is sane—”

Tubbo's awake.

His face is being illuminated by the harsh blue light of a laptop screen. His mouth is slightly open and eyes are wide.

"Tubbo?" Tommy asks softly.

Turbo scowls and shifts in his seat. He doesn't appear to notice Tommy and Tommy takes a couple of steps forwards.

Schlatt is talking but Tommy ignores him.

He puts a hand on Tubbo's shoulder.

Flinching away, Tubbo jumps.

Then there's a knife at Tommy's throat and Tubbo is glaring. "Don't fucking touch me." He snarls.

Tommy nods slowly.

Tubbo drops the knife back on the table and sits down. His hands are shaking.

"What do you want?" Tubbo replies, looking back at the laptop. The laptop that Tommy got for Swinter—

Tommy sighs and puts the phone back up to his ear. "Do you wanna talk to him or—"

"Yes."

"Schlatt's worried."

Tubbo pales. "I'm not talkin' to him."

"Why?"

He looks back down at the laptop, his face dropping. He shakes his head and Tommy scowls. This appears to be more complex than he thought, and he is too tired for people to be having their own motives.

If everyone could not have their own motives, and Tommy being the only person with those. Then that would be great for him.

Tommy sighs, "Tubbo, you can't just ignore him forever. I think he's actually worried about you."

Tubbo's frown somehow deepens, and he takes the phone off of Tommy before holding up to his ear. "What the fuck do ya want?"

Tommy crosses his arms and watches Tubbo's face screw up.

Tubbo pauses, "Fuck you!" He yells, "Fuck off, leave me alone, I don't need your pity—"

He throws the phone back at Tommy, and he almost drops it on the ground. Eventually only saving it with his powers, and holding it back up to his ear.

"Fuck off!" Tubbo yells at Tommy.

Oh, that's new.

"Fuck off!" Tubbo yells again, he stands up.

Right— um okay. Tommy's not really sure how to handle this one.

“Tubbo...” Tommy drops the phone onto the ground.

“I don’t need your stupid fucking pity!” Tubbo yells again, “Okay? Why the fuck are you still here? Fuck off—”

“Tubbo—” he takes a step forward, phone loosely in his hand. Both hands out.

Tubbo moves quickly, lunging forwards.

Pain bursts through his jaw.

Then he’s sprawled on the ground, and the side of his face really fucking hurts.

Also his phone is on the ground. Which is not ideal.

Tubbo’s breathing heavily.

“Fuck off!”

Right, okay.

Tubbo just punched him in the face.

Cool.

“What the fuck?” Is the first thing Purpled says, apparently half awake. He picks Tommy up off the ground before standing in front of him. A shield between Tubbo and himself.

It’s just Tubbo, Tommy doesn’t need a shield.

It’s just Tubbo.

He nudges Purpled out of the way.

“Stay away from me!” Tubbo yells, he doesn’t appear to be quite sure what to do with his hands. He closes them and then opens them again, and closes them before just putting them at either side and glaring. “Fuck off, Tommy!”

“No?” Is Tommy’s best response, “You’re my friend, Tubbo, whatever’s bothering you—”

“I don’t need, your fuckin’ pity!” Tubbo yells again.

Ranboo emerges out of his room.

Purpled and Tommy on one side of the room, standing shoulder to shoulder. Tubbo and Ranboo on the other, Tubbo only a few metres away from Tommy, the phone between them, and Ranboo only hovering by the door on Tubbo’s side of the room. Like he’s not sure.

Almost separating them is the phone, which might be broken. But for some reason Tommy can’t bring himself to even try to pick it up. Instead he just stares at Tubbo with wide eyes, as Tubbo stares back at him with nothing apart from anger.

He just looks... so angry.

“Tubbo—” Ranboo says gently, putting a hand on Tubbo’s shoulder.

Tubbo’s face drops slightly and the fight in his shoulders and posture appears to relax almost completely.

Tommy tries not to let it sting.

It fails.

“Come on,” Ranboo says softly, “You need to get some sleep.”

“Fuck off,” Tubbo brushes him off, “I’m getting this done. I need to find who’s the mole in Schlatt’s organisation— I need to—”

“Tubbo,” Ranboo says gently, “Please.”

And Tommy realises that, maybe he needs to trust that Ranboo has this under control. Because whatever it is, Tommy has set off something in Tubbo’s brain that’s making him freak out so much.

That may or may not be Tommy’s fault.

But what Tubbo needs right now is someone who isn’t freaking him out, someone who is Ranboo.

Purpled’s hand curls around Tommy’s shoulder and pulls him back slightly.

Both Ranboo and Tommy exchange a glance.

It's a tired glance, and Ranboo just seems... like there's something weighing down on him. And Tommy assumes he looks much the same. Ranboo opens his mouth to say something, and closes it again.

For a moment he pauses.

"Tomorrow." Ranboo mouths.

And... Tommy can do that, he can wait until tomorrow. As long as Tubbo's alright, he can wait for a long time.

He picks up the phone from the floor as Tubbo slams the door shut across from them.

"Well, Ender—the fuck was that?" Purpled hisses.

Tommy ignores him and instead holds the phone up to his ear.

"What's Tubbo trying to do?" Schlatt asks.

"Find the mole in your company."

Schlatt pauses, he hums like he's thinking.

Tommy waits, he doesn't have much else to do.

"What happened to him?" Is what Schlatt eventually says. *"Who hurt him?"*

"Fighting rings. Probably searched too far and got caught—"

"Give me twenty-four hours."

"Huh?"

"I'll find the guy who hurt Tubbo." Schlatt says, "My guess is a fighting ring leader sent his lackey's after him."

"Wait so what are you gonna do—"

Schlatt hangs up.

"Fucking tech people, should've been theatre kids." Tommy mutters under his breath before looking at Purpled. "Can people tell us shit? Just for once in their lives?"

"Apparently not," Purpled says starting at the door that's been slammed shut and the low murmurs of conversation that they can't quite hear.

Tommy sighs.

"Dramatic shits."

Tommy stomps back to his bedroom. Unlike some dramatic dickheads in his house, he doesn't slam the door shut. He doesn't even close it so Purpled can still get in.

He throws himself at his bed, burying his face into the pillow and sighing. He has the urge to scream into his pillow.

However, screaming at *anything* at two in the morning is bad enough. Let alone another human and so he doesn't.

Instead he sleeps.

For once he gets alright sleep.

Purpled's alarm goes off because he apparently has an earlier shift than usual. Which... yeah makes sense.

Tommy also wakes up, which means the entire house is awake.

Getting ready is as fun as always, basically because this time he gets to stare at a horrendous bruise on the side of his face.

That's... not gonna be fun to explain.

It also looks like he was punched in the face too, like someone really had it out for him and so decked him.

Is he gonna have to make up an imaginary roommate he can blame everything on? Because like... he *could*.

Tubbo runs off to school, refusing to look at Tommy.

"Don't you have school?" Tommy asks Ranboo.

Ranboo is sitting on the kitchen counter, he's cradling an entire tub of ice cream in his lap and has a spoon.

He hands a spoon to Tommy.

Tommy jumps up on the counter, and Ranboo moves the ice cream tub so it's in between them.

It's cookies and cream.

They eat it silently for a while, until about half of the tub is gone.

"Free period," Ranboo says. "Normally I go in to do homework, but it's an ice cream kinda day."

"Could say that again," Tommy scoffs, taking another spoonful out of the tub.

"It's an ice cream kinda day."

"I will stab you."

Ranboo rolls his eyes and also gets another spoonful of ice cream before swinging his legs back and forth. "So. Tubbo."

"So, Tubbo," Tommy confirms.

"He's— stressed."

"Holy fuck, that explains the fact it looks like I got fucking pummelled. Thanks for clearing that up Ranboo—"

"Don't be awful," Ranboo says. "You were awful to us when you were stressed, and now Tubbo is clearly going through a lot."

"I never punched you."

"You went to punch me. You were fourteen, remember?"

Yes. Tommy remembers. He didn't think it was Ranboo, something still fighting in his brain said that it was his dad. Then Tommy went to swing, before actually opening his eyes and realising that it was Ranboo, and he was about to hurt Ranboo.

He'd cried for an embarrassingly long time after that.

In fact, he had a panic attack bad enough that he threw up. He didn't really know that was a thing.

He's done that like three times since then.

"I didn't scream at you afterwards."

"True," Ranboo hums in agreement, having a huge spoonful of ice cream. He doesn't speak for a moment because... he's eating ice cream. "But Tubbo doesn't get scared— well he does, but he gets angry."

Tommy frowns.

Ranboo sighs. “He’s just scared. And he remembers more about the fighting rings than me, and he’s still scared about those, and his parents and whatever else he’s keeping from y— us. He’s not some unmovable force, he’s just a kid.”

“So punch the abuse survivor,” Tommy deadpans.

“Because he’s *also* an abuse survivor, not because you are one. He reacted like that because of his trauma, and you’re reacting like this because of yours. And I’m mediating because I hate people fighting.”

Tommy glares, not at anyone. But out of annoyance he takes the ice cream tub off of Ranboo and holds it in his arms. Ranboo doesn’t protest, so Tommy decides that it’s his. He frowns and thinks.

Mostly about the ice cream, where did Ranboo get this from. It’s really good, how expensive was it? Can Ranboo get more? Because this is really good, you gotta dig out the chunks too. The ideal form.

Tommy frowns, “Schlatt’s looking into the rings— I think.”

“Was he on the phone?”

“Yeah.”

They’re silent for a moment longer. “Do you think he’ll find anything?”

“Not sure,” Tommy whispers, “If he does, I’m going to make the sick fuck who let this happen to Tubbo wish they were never born.”

“Tommy—” Ranboo pauses, he closes his eyes, like he’s currently having the internal debate of his fucking life. He opens his eyes and gives Tommy a small smile. “Give ‘em a couple good hits for me. Promise?”

And if Ranboo— Mister “Fighting Related Trauma” gives Tommy permission to beat the fuck out of someone... then Tommy thinks that he’s allowed to beat the fuck outta someone. And it’s deserved too.

“Can do,” Tommy says.

They sit there in silence for a bit longer, and Tommy has little else to say.

“I think...” Ranboo’s words are unsure, and Tommy stays quiet. His voice has the edge of someone who’s had a lot of thought about this for a long time. “I think Tubbo’s lied to me about some things from the fighting rings. To save— himself from having to deal with it maybe, or because he thought I would be better off but... I don’t think I am better off not knowing, y’know?”

Tommy nods.

“Like— memory loss from head trauma tends to be repeated head trauma. Tubbo said that I was only in one fight, but that doesn’t make sense. Neither does why there are *so* many records from the fighting rings.”

Tommy stays quiet.

“Has he told you something?” Ranboo asks, making quick eye-contact before looking down at the floor again.

“Yes.”

“It wasn’t my first fight, was it?”

Tommy hesitates. “No... it wasn’t.”

“Huh.” Ranboo mutters, he leans back and crosses his arms staring out across the room. “Tommy... the person who ordered the attack on Tubbo was probably the person at the warehouse, and my fighting ring leader.”

Tommy doesn’t know what to say, and he doesn’t think Ranboo wants him to say anything and so he remains perfectly quiet. Swinging his legs and ready to listen, because if it was reversed that’s what he’d want for Ranboo to do. Stay quiet, and be willing to listen.

“There’s only three or four around the area,” Ranboo mutters. “I— if it is the ringleader of my fighting ring—” his voice shakes and Tommy wants to hug him so tightly he crushes Ranboo’s ribs. “Make it hurt.”

“I can do that.”

“Make it hurt,” Ranboo repeats. “Okay? For Tubbo, and me— and everyone else who got hurt.”

Tommy nods. “If we find him— I’ll make sure.”

“Thank you,” the relief rolling off of Ranboo’s voice is alone enough to make Tommy decide that it would be worth it in itself. “You’re a good friend. You’re a good person.”

“Will you be okay?” Tommy asks.

“Yeah,” Ranboo nods his head once. “I’ll be okay as long as you make sure that whoever wanted to hurt Tubbo, and succeeded is in almost as much pain as he was.”

“I can do that.”

“I know.”

“Okay.”

They’re both quiet. The ice cream tub is empty, and Tommy probably needs to go to work, and Ranboo probably needs to get to class.

“We’ll be okay,” Tommy eventually says.

Ranboo looks at him surprised. “Huh?”

“All of us,” Tommy jumps off the counter, and grabs his backpack off the couch. “We’ll be okay one day— maybe not today, or any day we can imagine in the near future. But we’ll do alright.”

Ranboo manages a small smile. “Yeah. I think we will.”

And Tommy manages to smile back, slightly brighter than Ranboo’s.

The train ride to work sucks.

His earphones aren’t working, they’re broken so they’re way quieter than usual. Which means Tommy needs to turn them up, and even the top volume setting still isn’t that loud.

This feels classist.

“Stupid fuckin’ headphones,” is what he mutters as he gets off the train and starts on the walk towards the tower. He taps on them like that’ll do anything. It doesn’t do anything because he’s being hate-crimed.

Is that how hate crimes work? No.

Is he going to say that’s how they work? Yes. Totally, 100%.

“Stupid fucking— Hi Kristin! Headphones, piece of shit.”

Tommy runs into someone.

The someone is Wilbur, who doesn’t look *mad* to say. He looks... pissed, like really pissed. And to be fair, he should be pissed. But still.

Tommy takes out an earphone.

“Your music is so loud.”

“It’s really not—”

“Phil wants to speak to you.”

Oh! Tommy’s straight up getting fired. To be honest he hadn’t really considered this outcome, he’d been too busy thinking about his revenge arc that he’s probably going to have soon. Cool, okay, Tommy needs to figure out how to do this.

Sob story? He can work a sob story. He'll just make something up, about a tragic past— he wouldn't have to make that up. Maybe he can make up a new story and try to make people sob about it.

Phil seems like that kinda guy who would be weak when it came to anything involving a child being wronged. Wilbur seems like the kinda guy who would get upset if something about powers were involved. Techno's... Techno's harder to make cry, but Tommy will find a way. Maybe about hybrids?

Oh hybrid stuff would make Techno sob.

Okay children, powers and hybrids.

Yeah Tommy can work with that real easily. Cool. Cool. Okay, okay so—

He steps into the elevator, and Wilbur presses the button. There's no banter this time.

Great! Tommy is straight up getting fired.

He puts his headphones in, and turns up his music.

Wilbur glares at him.

The elevator eventually opens and Tommy is humming to his tunes. He sees Phil sitting there on one of the couches, and Techno sitting on the arm of the couch because apparently he can't sit like a normal human.

Tommy sits down in a seat across from them.

He then is kind enough to pull out his earphones, and give them all a big grin.

Wilbur pulls a face, “What the fuck Tommy? Your music is so loud?”

“It’s literally not you fucking drama queen—”

“Tommy,” Phil sighs.

Tommy crosses his arms and scowls. “I just wanna listen to my tunes—”

“—that are so loud, it’s probably sending you deaf.”

“They’re not even that loud, you just have weak ears.”

“*I do not .*”

Tommy grins, “Weak ears.”

“What the fuck is wrong with you—”

“Not weak ears, that’s for sure.”

Phil sighs, “Boys.”

“Dad, he’s being difficult.”

“So are you,” Techno deadpans.

“All of you, quiet,” Phil says.

He pinches the bridge of his nose and takes a deep breath.

The room is silent for a moment slightly too long for Tommy’s liking.

“So,” Tommy drawls, stretching out the word annoyingly long. “How have you been?”

“Fine,” Wilbur says.

Techno groans. “Just get this over with.”

Phil clears his throat, “Tommy. Are you sixteen?”

Tommy looks at Techno.

Techno shrugs.

Well that’s no fucking help, Tommy needs some context clues depending on how mad Phil and Wilbur are about this. Does this mean Tommy will get fired— because he can not afford to be fired, no matter what.

That’s going to get him in a lot of trouble, and yeah— they could last for a while. They now have another wholeass income, so they *could* figure it out for a bit. But Tommy kinda likes this job, he likes Phil and Wilbur and Techno and—

Yeah.

Tommy crosses his arms. “Let’s say if I hypothetically I was. Then what would you hypothetically fire me? Or— what would you do? Hypothetically, of course.”

“Well,” Phil says, not missing a beat. “In this hypothetical situation, all of your paperwork says your nineteen, and if we couldn’t find any holes in it. Considering you got the job, there’s none. Then... we’d have to chalk it up to the half delirious ramblings of someone who was exhausted.”

“Oh my fucking God you’re the best,” Tommy says. “Thank Prime it’s hypothetical though. No basis in reality. Completely and utterly hypothetical.”

“What the fuck is going on—” Wilbur starts.

“So,” Phil says, “Hypothetically nothing would change. Now Tommy, are you sixteen or nineteen because I’m getting conflicting answers. Your paperwork says nineteen, you said sixteen. Explain.”

Tommy starts bouncing his leg, which doesn’t seem like his best possible response to that, but it’s what he does and therefore everyone else is going to have to put up with it.

He tugs on the chain of the necklace Techno gave him all that time back. (Okay it was like two weeks ago at the max.) He’s found it to be really good to mess around with when he’s anxious.

And holy fuck he’s anxious.

If he tells the truth he has to explain why the fuck his birth certificate is like that. And why he graduated highschool at the ripe old age of thirteen— and had legal custody over himself at thirteen not sixteen.

He looks up at Phil and Wilbur, and the complete concern on their faces.

Techno is standing a little bit away, with his arms crossed. The pair of them make eye contact, Techno tilts his head up in the smallest nod in existence.

Tommy can take care of himself, if things go pear-shaped he has both Techno here and well... he can take Philza in a fight. (He's done it like twice now, both as Theseus and Tommy.)

With a glare, Tommy crosses his arms. "What do you wanna know?"

"Why are there no holes in the story," Phil says leaning forward in his seat. "The birth certificate provided is correct and belongs to a Thomas Underscore. But you aren't nineteen. Tied to that if a full life worth of stuff, foster care—"

"Ha."

"Bank accounts. It all adds up, and none of the things it branches off into are fake. If this is a cover story, it's a fucking amazing one."

Tommy sighs, "It's not my birth certificate—"

"Huh?"

"I've been using it for... ten years maybe. That's why there's stuff tied to it. Because I've been using it. It's not supposed to be a cover story... it's just me."

Wilbur and Techno exchange a glance.

"Whose birth certificate is it?" Wilbur says slowly, like the words don't fit right in his mouth. "If it's not yours. Well it was, now it isn't."

Tommy sighs.

How deep is he going to go into this mess? He looks at Techno, he looks worried but understanding.

Techno will get it, even if the other two don't.

And Tommy is tired of hiding. Hiding he's Theseus, his parents— he's tired of hiding out of necessity. He can at least reveal this.

"The body they swapped with mine," Tommy says slowly. "Legally... well I'm dead. But Thomas Underscore is not."

"Your real name isn't Thomas?" Wilbur shrieks.

"Uh... I don't think so. I just got called Tom, but it might be. So— yeah..."

Techno's eyebrows are furrowed. "Why did they swap you with the body of someone who was thirteen?"

Tommy looks down at his feet. "Uh— dunno. Cover up or something, somethin' to do with gangs? I dunno." The lie doesn't roll as smoothly as he'd like it, because Techno frowns a little more.

Ah. Fuck.

"Who?" Wilbur presses, "Who goes to that effort to cover up the supposed death of just a normal ten-year-old?"

"Leave it." Tommy snaps.

Wilbur blinks and sits back in his seat. Techno hits him in the arm, which must hurt because Wilbur holds his arm and glares. Techno gives an innocent smile and turns back to Tommy.

"So." Phil says. "You're nineteen. Remember. And anything you say about not being nineteen is the ramblings of someone who's exhausted."

"Yes Philza Minecraft," Tommy salutes. "Anything for you, Philza Minecraft."

Phil sighs.

"Someone's being a fanboy again," Wilbur says in a tone that means Tommy will have to murder him.

Tommy sighs. "Philza Minecraft, do I have permission to murder your son?"

"Yeah sure. Make it quiet I have a headache—"

The elevator door opens and Dream runs in. This in itself is not overly odd.

Something that is odd is that he's in his hero gear.

Dream has a green poncho-cloak thing that goes down to about the middle of his thighs. Which also has a hood that's currently pulled up so his hair is covered. He also has arm wraps which wrap around his hands too.

He's also taller.

Does this motherfucker have platforms?

"Dream?"

Dream wheezes for breath. "Elysium— attack— Upper L'Manberg." He holds the wall as he tries to breathe. "Police precinct—"

"Let it burn." Tommy and Techno say at the same time. Techno smiles slightly.

"Huh?" Phil says. "We can't let anywhere burn—"

Tommy frowns. "But why? I mean, we don't even have a police precinct in Logstedchire and we're doing just fine."

"I wouldn't go that far—" Wilbur starts.

He's shut up by withering glares from both Tommy and Techno.

"Sorry vigilantes can't do the hero's job in Upper L'Manberg too," Tommy spits. "There's sorta this little law... law of doom, vigilante act— means Logstedchire needs vigilantes because none of you fuckers do your fucking job."

"Okayyy," Dream says. "Uh, sorry to interrupt the family drama. But there is a police precinct on fire and Phil you've been sent out to capture Elysium members—"

"Oh shit." Phil says and runs off to... well who knows where.

Dream looks at the windows. "Can you open those?"

"No?"

"WHAT'S THE POINT IN A PARAGLIDER IF YOU CAN'T FUCKING USE IT?" Dream yells, before running for the elevator.

Tommy blinks a couple of times.

Right okay—

Wilbur looks at Tommy. "You know we don't decide where we patrol?"

"Oh, but you can decide to go after Theseus? But not whether or not to help the people of Logstedchire?"

Wilbur hesitates. "We're not connected to the police radio like we are in the other districts. We don't have plants either. If you go to Logstedchire and get hurt— then that's on you and you have to pay the medical bills."

Tommy glares.

Wilbur shrugs. "That's the truth of it. It's shitty but it's the truth."

"You can afford to pay."

Wilbur nods. "I can."

Tommy glares. "Vigilantes are born out of necessity, most people believe it or not probably don't want to be fighting to keep themselves out of jail and lying to both friends and family."

"Then why become one?"

"Because some things are bigger than you, Wilbur!" Tommy yells.

"Tommy." Techno says, his tone more than a warning. He puts a hand on Tommy's shoulder and Tommy brushes it off easily.

"No— he can't just—"

A spark forms in Tommy's hand and he puts it behind his back without a word. Wilbur doesn't say anything so Tommy thinks it's fine—

Oh it is not fine at all— he's gonna tear something apart.

Techno picks up a coffee mug and pelts it at the window.

Wilbur jumps, before grabbing Techno's shoulders and hiding behind him. "My favourite mug! Techno!"

Tommy looks at the other mug, the one not smashed against the window and instead the one on the kitchen counter which has broken silently. His hands are still sparking, thankfully Wilbur is not looking at him.

"Piglin instincts..." Techno deadpans. "A little understood thing."

"My favourite mug!" Wilbur wails. "Fundy got me that!"

"If that's the fish fear me, women want me—"

"Yup!"

"Oh thank fuck—"

"Hello." Henry's voice chimes out and Tommy screams.

Wilbur and Techno both turn to look at him, the exact same judgemental expression in their eyes.

"Hah— hi, Henry. Hi." Tommy clutches his chest like an old man who has been mildly startled, because that basically is what he is at the moment.

Techno snickers.

Tommy flips him off.

"Hello Thomas!" Henry says cheerily. "And... you two..." his tone darkens slightly. "Sam would like you on the lab floor."

"Why?" Wilbur says. "Why is Tommy going to the lab floor—"

"Fuck off," Tommy snaps. "Yes I'll go. Uh. What floor?"

"Twenty and twenty-one," Henry says, "Sam is on twenty."

Tommy nods and hops in the elevator. He flips off both of them as the door closes dramatically.

It's very funny.

The music is... pretty chill. Pretty standard and Tommy stares at the dent in the door of the elevator.

It looks oddly human shaped.

Who got thrown into an elevator door, because now Tommy really wants to know. Like really badly.

He squints at the door.

Eventually said door opens.

Now Tommy's been on a lot of the floors. But not this one and the vibe is so fucking different it's wild.

The rooms have high roofs, maybe... four metres high. The walls are all white, but there's just... shit everywhere.

Tools hanging on the walls, spare parts all over the floor. There's a car being pulled apart by two people a little ways away. Then a little further is a plane wing.

Why the fuck is there a plane wing?

There's also rock music playing from a speaker in the furthest corner and two people are vibing to that.

And that's just on the right side of the room.

On the left side he can see several huge work tables with just *shit* on them. So much shit. Half finished inventions and other things of the sort.

Tommy steps over a skateboard which only has one wheel and walks forwards. He looks around.

Everyone working on various projects stop and look up at Tommy.

"Uh— I'm Tommy?"

"The guy who decked Philza?"

"Yeah."

"Holy fuck!" One of them says, "I didn't think you were real, I thought Sam made it up. Edited the footage.".

Someone rolls out from under the closest car and raises an eyebrow. "So, what brings you here, Tommy?"

"I need to find Sam."

Several people point at a door to his left.

"Warning, he is having a slight breakdown over this. Turns out power suppressors aren't a walk in the park or they would've been made already."

Wait what—

"Tommy!" Sam says, poking his head out of his door. "Here."

Tommy starts walking over before he can really stop himself.

Then he's in what is a messier and smaller workshop. It's just benches, with some electrical parts. There's a laptop open and some coding shit that Tommy can't be fucked to try to understand.

On one of the workbenches it looks like there's half of a mechanical wing. There's some wires sticking out of it, and Tommy looks at it for a moment long. It's half torn apart and there are screws and scrap bits of metal littering the bench.

On one of the others is... a car door, for some reason. Tommy doesn't really understand why the car door is there— but he's also not an overly smart person. He squints at the code again. Something about... that literally looks like HTML.

Is Sam coding a version of snake— and leaving it open so people who don't know code awe at his skills? Because Tommy can get on board with that. Pop off so hard king.

"Neb said bye to you, you just ignored her," Sam muses.

"Oh." Tommy turns around like the door isn't closed. "I didn't hear."

"Okay!" Sam says. He picks up something that looks a lot like a bracelet and hands it to Tommy. "You don't have powers right?"

"Uh... yeah, I don't?"

"Cool, great— excellent. Basically, this is supposed to suppress powers. However I don't wanna test it on like Wilbur. Basically, nothing is supposed to happen. Then I'll put it on afterwards and I'm supposed to pass out."

"What the fuck?"

Sam looks like he has not slept in several days. "I had to reverse engineer blue for this. Okay so basically, it's going to stab chemicals into your bloodstream."

"It's gonna what now?"

"You won't even feel it. Blue works because it activates hybrid genes, making powers stronger. So if you reverse engineer that, then you can suppress powers."

"Oh." Tommy looks at the bracelet.

If that really is a power suppressor, then he should at least know what it's gonna do to him. If he gets got as Theseus, he needs to know what the fuck he's dealing with

What's the worst that can happen?

Tommy picks up the bracelet. It's slightly clunky and he can still see bits of wire sticking out.

Right. Cool.

Tommy sighs and puts it on.

For a moment nothing happens and he looks at Sam.

Then his vision starts swimming, little dots appear and everything starts shaking. Like an Earthquake is happening.

His arms feel impossibly heavy, as do his eyes.

Oh he feels fucking *weird*. Like, holy fuck. This is just odd. It feels *off*, *there's* no other way to describe it, apart from weird. Like really fucking weird.

“Woah,” Tommy mutters, “I dunno if this is supposed to be happening—”

Then his legs give out on him.

Oh this is gonna hurt—

"Okay we need to get him to the medical floor, he's going to be out for at least an hour maybe two—"

Tommy sits up.

Several pairs of concerned eyes are looking at him.

His head hurts, but he feels okay.

Sam is crouching so he's at Tommy's level. He grabs the side of his face before rudely shining a light into his eyes.

Tommy yelps, pushing Sam away and rubbing his eyes. "My eyes! What the fuck Samuel?"

"How the fuck—" someone says. "That was thirty-three seconds."

"Maybe he has really weak hybrid connections?"

"Records say parents were avians... maybe his metabolism is insane."

Sam ignores them all and focuses on Tommy.

"Okay. I'm checking for a concussion kid. Say the months of the year in reverse order."

Tommy blinks at Sam. "Are you fuckin' kidding me. I don't have a concussion—"

“Just do this.”

“December... November... Sep— no October, *then* September. And... ah fuck. Maybe I do have a concussion.”

“He has a concussion,” someone groans. “Now we have to take him. Sam, you gave the kid who can deck Philza Minecraft a concussion.”

“Shut up,” Sam says and they shut up. “Henry? How’s he lookin’?”

“With his eyes, boss.”

Sam sighs. “Make an AI that can learn, they said,” he snaps, “It would be fun, they said. Henry, is Tommy displaying the signs of having a concussion?”

“It appears so, protocol says to take him to the medical floor just in case. I’m alerting Wilbur and Technoblade at the moment so they can meet you there.” Henry sounds tired, which... mood bestie.

Tommy groans, “Don’t fuckin’, bring Wilbur— the prick, I hate him. I wanna kick him off a roof.”

“Uh...” someone says, “Are they like having family drama or something? Because I really do not want to get in the way of that.”

“You’re not getting in anyone’s way, Sky,” Sam says, he sounds about a thousand years older. If Tommy would have to lowball. Almost as old as Philza himself— what a man. “Tommy, we need to get you off the floor.”

What a good idea.

Tommy's hauled off the ground and he stands on his feet.

Being dragged to the medical floor is a little bit blurry. He knows Sam went with him, and someone else with him. Tommy remembers very little about this person. Only that they had dark hair and... were those fucking rich people glasses? Probably... Louis Vutton or, fuckin' other rich people brands—

He doesn't know any rich people's brands.

“What glasses are those?”

“Huh?”

“Glasses,” Tommy repeats.

“Versace.”

“Bless you.”

“No—”

Sam sounds impossibly tired. “Tommy.”

“Sorry.”

Silence in the elevator for a moment.

“So what do you even do here?” Tommy asks.

“What do *you* do here?” They challenge, before looking back down at the tablet they’re holding like Tommy barely even spoke. Rude.

“Don’t be rude,” Sam says and Tommy has no clue which one he’s talking to.

The elevator doors slide open and Sam puts an arm around Tommy’s shoulders, before guiding him towards the medical bay. Versace person taps on the tablet as they walk behind them.

Eventually Tommy sits down on one of the beds in the hospital. He sits there quietly like the polite person he is, it may have something to do with the cloud in his head. It’s making thinking difficult.

Like there’s a huge little fluffy cloud in his head, making everything fuzzy.

This feels important to note and try to avoid.

Tommy sighs.

“Sup,” Techno says. He has a smoothie— how did Techno get a smoothie? Tommy has no clue to be quite frank. He throws the smoothie into a bin nearby before looking back. What a man. Technoblade with a smoothie, what will he do?

Wilbur walks in behind him, he shoves Techno out of the way and stands in front of Tommy. “Are you okay? Who did this, I’ll literally kill them. Don’t think I won’t, Sam’s on fucking thin ice and if this was his fault I will end his life.”

Techno snickers.

Wilbur flips him off without looking away from Tommy.

“Tommy?”

“Gotta be quiet,” Tommy says.

“Huh?” Techno says, no longer looking at his smoothie.

“Hospital, gotta be quiet,” Tommy whispers.

“That’s... not a rule. Right?” Wilbur looks over his shoulder so he’s looking at Techno.

“That’s not a rule, right?”

“I hope not,” Techno muses. “We should’ve been kicked out years ago.”

Wilbur sits on the bed next to Tommy and Tommy looks down at his feet. He has to be quiet, it’s a hospital and doctors are doing doctor things like being concerned for other people and making sure people aren’t injured.

Tommy’s mostly fine, so he has to be quiet.

“You okay, Toms?” Wilbur asks.

“Fine,” Tommy says, and it doesn’t even feel like that much of a lie. “Everything’s all fuzzy and shit.”

Wilbur looks at Techno, panic in his eyes. “Is that normal?”

“Yes, that’s normal,” Techno mutters. “Chill out Wil.”

Wilbur does not chill out.

Yeah, sounds about right.

Techno sighs and sits on the other side of Tommy.

“No blood tests,” Tommy whispers.

“Pardon?” Wilbur says, ever the polite man.

“If they gotta find out what went wrong, no blood tests.”

“But—”

“Okay,” Techno says, “No blood tests. Easy done.”

Wilbur sighs, before leaning back. His head and legs are half hanging off because he’s lying horizontally on the bed, and Wilbur is problematically tall. It’s pretty rude of him not gonna lie.

Techno does the same thing and also sighs.

Tommy lays down in between them.

It feels safe.

“So... did that police precinct burn down?” Techno asks.

“Mhmm,” Wilbur hums, “Not like to the crisp, but burnt enough that a good part of the budget will need to be used on fixing it—”

“Oh,” Tommy says, “That’s what they were doin’.”

“How’s Fundy?” Techno asks, apparently more than happy to lead them away from this conversation that would probably end with some sort of argument.

Wilbur sighs. “His hearing’s gone all funky.”

Techno seems to be shocked by this because he looks at Wilbur confused. Tommy looks up at the roof. It’s not overly amazing, but it’s a pretty cool looking roof nonetheless, it’s not falling apart.

Ha. Unlike his life.

“Oh, is he doin’ alright?”

“Yeah,” Wilbur says, “Some hearing loss they think, he might need a hearing aid. It’s only bad in one of his ears. He’s doing a lot better though, he went out yesterday... I think he and Dream got black forest cake.”

“A good first outing,” Techno laughs.

Tommy’s tired.

He feels just... weird, everything is off. Like he knows where everything is in his brain, they just moved everything slightly. Sorting through his thoughts is a fun time, so he just looks up at the ceiling and lets himself sink into it.

Theseus is a dumb name.

Egg salad rolls aren't like *that* good, he's just really fucking hungry. And now he wants sushi — the last time he had sushi was with Tubbo. Before everything went terribly wrong and a firework was shot at his face.

His life. It's going well.

If he ignores the following factors: his parents, Business Bay (just in general), the fact that Spectre and Phil hate him, his powers being uncontrollable, Tubbo's entire situation, Elysium's Angels, the gala, his parents (honourable mention.) The fact if he gets caught as a vigilante Tubbo, Ranboo, Purpled and Techno are all royally fucked. Just... completely fucked. The fact he can't really sleep well anymore, the constant nightmares, the panic attacks, the constant injuries, the fighting rings looming in the background. His parents (another honourable mention.)

Yeah. This is fine.

He can handle this, like a boss.

The warehouse, the gala, Wilbur kicking him off of a roof, Phil trying to attack him, constant Elysium attacks and not knowing what to do with them. Having to constantly lie to almost everyone he actually cares about—

Yeah. This is great.

Theseus really is a dumb name for a vigilante—

“Tommy?” Wilbur shakes Tommy’s shoulders and Tommy snaps out of whatever funk he’s in. “You okay there?”

Tommy nods, before looking back up at the roof.

“Have I ever told you about Heracles and Theseus?” Techno says.

Tommy sits up, looking at him. He shuffles so he’s sitting on the bed, his legs crossed under him. Techno does the same thing, but shuffles so he’s up against the bed frame. Wilbur’s bones crack as he also sits up but leaves his legs hanging off the bed.

Techno takes a deep breath, “So Heracles right—”

“Hercules,” Tommy says.

“No. *Heracles*. Hercules is Roman, I’m talking about Greek mythology.”

“So Hercules...”

“No,” Techno sighs, “Heracles, he’s named Heracles after Hera, because Hera was upset about his existence. So he had to do a bunch of trials or something, I forgot what exactly those were, but he had to like... kill something. Also Heracles is the great-grandson of... Perseus I think, depending on which version. That’s not relevant, just a fun fact. He also killed his wife and kids because Hera like... fucked with his brain or something—”

“You have missed the topic,” Wilbur deadpans.

“Oh yeah, Theseus. Okay so he was the son of Zeus and Agreus, which, I’m not really sure how. But we keep on moving. Agreus had to go back to Greece but he buried some shoes and

a shield under a rock.”

“Absent parents and someone else raised him?” Wilbur deadpans, “Sounds familiar,” he pokes Tommy in the side of the head, and Tommy responds by hitting Wilbur in the face.

Wilbur yelps and Techno laughs.

Tommy smiles innocently and looks back at Techno.

“Then Theseus’s mum... what’s her name. I forgot, but basically she was like *you’re a demi-god. Good luck I guess*. And then made him pick up a rock to prove it and he grabbed the shoes and shield— maybe it’s a sword. I don’t *really* remember. Then he has this whole character arc on the way to Athens. Some more stuff happens, I think he almost gets assassinated and there’s this whole arc about why every eight or nine... years they gotta feed people to the minotaur.”

“They have to what?” Wilbur squeeks.

“Whole character arc, Athenian dude murdered a Minos prince... famous dude. And then Minos was mad about it. So they kept sending off people to be eaten by the Minotaur, and Theseus the idiot thought he could defeat it. Uh... betrayed Ariadne, who helped him get out of the labyrinth. Came back a hero, Agreus thought he was dead and did *not* handle it well.” Techno pauses, apparently thinking for a moment.

Wilbur leans against the back of Tommy’s shoulder, and Tommy doesn’t hit him away this time.

“Oh yeah, more stuff. Uh his best friend stops being a side character for like three seconds, forgot what he does though. He decides he hasn’t had enough character arcs, tries to kidnap Persephone, Heracles saves him from Hades.”

“Why’d he try to kidnap Persephone?”

“Because Theseus is a bad dude.”

“Hey both of them have that in common,” Wilbur adds.

Tommy pushes Wilbur off the bed.

He hits the ground with a thump and sighs. “Okay I deserved that.”

“Yeah, you fuckin’ did,” Techno snaps. “You’ve lost bed privileges.”

Wilbur frowns, but crosses his legs and peers over the edge. Setting his chin on the bed, and frowning up at Techno.

Techno responds by grabbing a pillow off the bed next to them and hitting Wilbur on the head with it. Wilbur does not move or flinch, and apparently Techno does not think that’s worth it.

He rolls his eyes, and looks back at Tommy.

“I think he made a bet with his friend? He kidnapped Helen of Troy and Theseus was supposed to capture Persephone. And Hades was not a fan and so Theseus was trapped to this throne thing.”

“Why capture Persephone?” Wilbur complains, “She’s so cool.”

“True,” Techno adds, “Even though in most classical versions of the myth the situations are a bit concerning... but she’s cool. Someone who controls spring *and* can kill you— well Hades can’t kill you. Persephone is cool though, she almost outsmarted Hades, not quite— but that’s about the most agency she’s given in most interpretations of the story.”

“Nerd,” Wilbur says, his voice filled with a disgusting amount of affection.

“Yeah, so Theseus tried to kidnap Persephone. Did not go well because Heracles had to drag him right the fuck outta there. Heracles did also— yeah murder his wife and kids because of Hera.”

“That’s... dark.”

“Yeah,” Techno says. He trails off for a moment before shaking his head and snapping himself back into this, whatever *this* is. “Uh... then he came back to Athens, and all his senators blamed him for everything that went wrong ever. And so they kicked him out to exile, and there in exile everyone loved him. And so the king of the island he was exiled on was all mad about the fact he thought he would get overthrown. So he just... yeeted him off a cliff.”

Tommy finally finds his voice, “Like how his dad died?”

Techno pauses, and looks at Tommy. “Y— yeah kinda,” he eventually manages. “Both a cliff... well some say Theseus got pushed off a tower, but the most widely accepted thing is a cliff—”

“Same way his dad died,” Wilbur adds. “That’s... pretty upsetting, not gonna lie.”

“Greek myths tend to be,” Techno says.

Tommy looks down at the sheet on the hospital bed and picks at it.

“Let’s hope our Theseus doesn’t turn out the same way,” Wilbur mutters.

Both Techno and Tommy look at him, with pretty similar expressions.

“What?” Wilbur says, “I don’t wish death upon the guy—”

“You kicked him off a roof.” Techno deadpans.

“Yeah, but I still don’t want him *dead*,” Wilbur scowls. “He’s... y’know. Like I don’t *like* him but I want him to be alive, he probably has people who care about him. Like you, Tommy, or Techno or any of us. People care about him, and... his loved ones don’t deserve to see him dead or injured.”

Techno stares at him. “You’re not going after Theseus anymore.” It’s not a question, and Tommy grips onto the hospital sheet a little bit more, his knuckles turn white and his fingers ache.

“No,” Wilbur eventually manages quietly. “I’m... no. I’m not.”

Techno glances at Tommy. “Wilbur found some human dignity, and they said it couldn’t be done. I’m so proud.”

“Fuck off,” Wilbur groans, “I hate you Techno.”

“Oh yeah?” Techno responds, “Throw me off a roof about it—”

Why is he here?

Like— well he has a concussion. And— why is he listening to this dumb argument about things that don’t really matter?

Why is Tommy here? Like... he's *here* because he got hired. But why was he hired in the first place? He has no experience, there were way more qualified people around, and instead they decided to hire a nineteen year old with no experience. It doesn't make sense.

He looks at Wilbur, Wilbur hired him— why did he do that?

“Why did you hire me?” Tommy says.

That cuts off both Techno's and Wilbur's argument that Tommy's tune out and Wilbur looks over at Tommy.

“Techno and Phil wanted to hire other people, they've told me. And you've said you were the one who fought to hire me. Techno's said that too— why did you hire me, Wilbur?”

Wilbur glances at Techno. “Well... first of all you had a personality, I tend to like that in a person. I didn't want someone who would take all of SBI's shit without getting a couple of their own insults in there too.”

Techno looks legitimately curious to the answer to this question, not as much as Tommy, but still a little bit.

“And— you also interviewed fairly well. For a kid, who's apparently sixteen. Your answer about the whole hero thing was actually pretty good. And the stressful situations answer was also very good. In truth yeah, I wasn't gonna hire you until Henry snitched on you and you immediately called him a bitch.”

“*That's* why?” Techno shrieks, “Unlike my pick who actually interviewed *without* having her ribs broken— you wanted to hire him because of that—”

“Well,” Wilbur says, “First of all, showed that he actually has a personality. Second of all, Henry intervened at the most inconvenient moment, so I assumed that he and Henry had

talked before. No one talked to Henry, not even when Henry would update me on stuff, everyone else stayed silent.”

Techno nods.

“So, that shows like... a bit of compassion at least, and treating an AI not like a tool and more like another member of the tower. Which is pretty standard here, so I knew you were going to be a relatively kind person. And then you kept getting funnier and funnier, and fucking determined if you came in with broken ribs—”

“Couldn’t reschedule,” Tommy mutters.

“So,” Wilbur moves so he’s sitting on the hospital bed and no one yells at him. He hesitates for a second, waiting for a reaction, but he doesn’t get one. “I thought you’d be a good fit with SBI, and you were obviously a hard worker and determined to get stuff done. Also you were from Logstedchire—”

Techno looks like he’s about to deck his brother.

“And,” Wilbur sighs, “Aren’t you tired of doing what everyone expects for you to do? Like Dream and Quackity put bets on which applicants would get through based on their resumes — and I was tired of being that person.”

Techno hums.

“And— he’s Tommy, y’know?” Wilbur gestures at him. “You’re *you* .”

“The fuck does that mean?” Tommy snaps.

“You’re the best of all of us,” Wilbur eventually says.

For a moment no one says anything.

Tommy wipes at his eyes like there's no tomorrow, because he doesn't overly fancy crying again. "I'm going to cry," he says, instead of... actually crying. "Wilbur what the fuck?" He wipes his eyes more. "Why am I crying so much, what the fuck?"

Wilbur just gives a small smile, "You're a good kid."

More tears fall from Tommy's eyes before he can stop them, but for once he can smile about it.

"Fuck you," Tommy says but he's grinning. "You prick, I hate you."

Wilbur just laughs.

"Wilbur," Henry says, making Wilbur jump and Techno pick up a pillow in self defence. "You're required."

"More... info?" Wilbur says.

"Quackity requested you."

"Is he crying?"

"Yes."

“Ah, fuck,” Wilbur stands up, but he hesitates, looking at Tommy and giving him a smile. “You were a good hire, I’m glad I met you.”

Then Wilbur leaves.

Techno waits for him to leave before grabbing Tommy’s shoulder. “Why the fuck would you ___”

“So I knew what they’d do to me,” Tommy snaps, shaking out of Techno’s grip.

“Yeah that’s great,” Techno hisses, “But now they’re gonna test you for powers.”

Tommy groans, “Are you kiddin’?”

“No, I’m not,” Techno snaps. “Okay. So they’re gonna bring out this really fancy box thing, basically you’d have to hold it. Then it... I forget what it does, but it like I think pricks your finger or does something genetically, figuring out how likely you’d be to have powers.”

“No blood tests.”

Techno sighs, “Basically. You’re gonna have to freak right the fuck out when you see it.”

“Huh?”

“Well... they’re not gonna *make* you do it,” Techno says slowly, checking over his shoulder. “And if you freak out enough, they’re not gonna—”

“Oh. Yeah I can do that.”

Then Sam and Versace glasses walk out. Sam's holding a box.

Tommy's stomach drops—

Fuck. Fuck, oh fuck—

He knows that piece of shit. It's smoother and nicer looking than what he's used to but he knows it nonetheless. It's a sleek glossy white box, which has two holes where you can put your hands in it.

What it actually does, is it pricks somewhere... he's not quite sure where, he can't really remember. But somewhere, and then it does an analysis of— something.

What he does know is that it's a blood test, and most kids do one when they're about five and then another when they're... ten.

Luckily enough Tommy missed out on the one when he was ten, slightly busy at the time.

It's a blood test— one that probably looks at genetics or something of some sort.

“Tommy, just hold onto this sweetie, it'll be over in a moment.” The voice drawls with the sickly tone he knows so well. The one that he can't stop thinking about— and sometimes he misses.

He needs to calm down—

They said no blood tests, Techno said no blood tests. He grabs onto Techno's arm and looks at him with frantic eyes, “You said no blood tests, you promised me no blood tests—”

“Calm down,” Techno says, “No blood tests.”

“Techno you said no blood tests! That’s a power recogniser which is a glorified blood test, you said no blood tests. Don’t— *Techno* .”

“Calm down,” Techno says again. Oh, if Tommy had only thought of that, then that would’ve changed everything! He’s so glad that Techno said that. “Okay, you’re not having a blood test, or any sort of testing.”

Tommy grabs onto Techno’s sleeve with more force. “I’m not— you can’t let them.”

“Tommy.”

“You said—”

“Tommy, listen to me,” Techno says. His voice is calm, much calmer than Tommy is at the moment. His eyes seem earnest too, and Tommy is quickly figuring out why Techno wears a mask on patrol, because his eyes tend to give everything away. “Okay, nothing is going to happen to you. No blood tests, nothing, alright?”

“Okay.”

Techno gets off of the hospital bed, before walking towards Sam and putting a hand on his shoulder. They say something in low tones, and then Techno looks back over his shoulder at Tommy and says something else.

Tommy tries to stop his hands shaking.

He's not having any sort of testing done— they're not gonna find out anything. Tommy can stay cool, calm and collected. Three things which he's *really, reallyyyy* good at all the time.

Techno turns back over his shoulder, and gives Tommy a thumbs up.

Tommy gives a slow nod back.

Cool. Great— he loves that for himself.

Versace glasses walks off with the box, and Tommy keeps his eyes on it the entire time. Sam and Techno walk back towards him. Sam sits on the end of the bed— he has inherently parent energy with the way he's sitting.

He looks awkward about it too, like he needs to ask Tommy's permission to be there.

Peak parent energy.

Tommy manages to smile a little bit because Sam just looks *so awkward*. Like... painfully so. Like... Tommy can not even find the right words for it, he looks like a parent who was just caught beating his kids or something—

Okay probably not the best example, but it's the one that comes to mind.

Sam glances at Techno, and Techno shrugs.

“Tommy... to your knowledge do you have powers?”

“No,” Tommy shakes his head. “Not powers.”

Techno raises an eyebrow but doesn't say anything else.

"Okay," Sam says gently, "There is a possibility you have some sort of power, just incredibly mild, which is why you woke up so quickly."

"Wait, what?" Techno says, and Sam looks up at him. "How long was he supposed to be out?"

"When I did tests on... well myself mainly, and the maths states that if the powers have any external effect then it should be about... two hours, more or less depending on the powers. So it would knock you out for... maybe three hours, depending on whether it would be able to suppress old powers."

Techno frowns. "So... say if Tommy had telekinesis or something like that. How long should he be out?"

"Two hours?" Sam says slowly, "Uh... maybe a bit less or more depending on the specifics."

"Okay what about my healing?"

"Probably closer to three, because it's in theory a more complex power. There are more moving parts to your healing than telekinesis. If Wilbur got a power suppressor on him it would probably knock him out for three hours, but Quackity it might only be two."

"Have you tried it on other powered people?"

"I tried it on Dream," Sam murmurs, "And he didn't pass out."

"So... do I have some sort of power?" Tommy adds, "Some sort of incredibly weak power that doesn't really matter?"

Sam pauses, “Well— I mean, it might glitch out on Techno. Because his powers have already been fucked up by blue, like it could knock him out for like... a day, or maybe a couple of minutes. Techno, can I try this on you—”

“No.”

“Okay, fair,” Sam says, “So, yeah you have some sort of really mild power. Maybe slightly better hearing, or you... I dunno can jump longer distances, something really small that probably wouldn’t even count on files.”

Tommy sighs, “It felt... weird.”

Sam pulls a face, and holds out his hand, Techno hands him a tablet and Sam grabs a stylus from the side of the tablet and starts writing. “What do you mean?”

“Like... I wasn’t in control,” Tommy says slowly and Sam writes that down. “Everything just felt off, like I knew what was happening, but not how to react to it properly. Like everything in my brain had been shifted a couple spots over.”

Sam frowns, “Now *that* should not have been happening even to powered people.”

“What do you mean?”

“Most people have the immediate reaction of just passing out, or if they stay upright for a couple more seconds then they think they’re fine and then they pass out,” Sam looks at Techno. “Are you sure about the test—”

“I will skin you alive if you even look at him while holding the recogniser.”

“Cool, sure then,” Sam looks slightly fearful and apparently believes whole-heartedly that Techno will do that. Tommy does too, if he’s being completely honest. “Techno I’m really gonna need to test it on you—”

“Maybe,” Techno’s arms are still crossed. “That’s the best you’re getting.”

“I’ll take that, I’ll take that.” Sam sighs, “Well... I need to lower the dose, and get to experiment on more powerful people.” He pauses for a moment. “How would Wilbur feel about this?”

“Shit.”

“Hmm... I’ll ask him tomorrow.”

“Sam.” Techno says, “When was the last time you slept?”

“Tuesday night.”

“Sam— it’s Friday.”

“What, no, it’s Wednesday—” Sam looks down at the tablet, apparently bringing up a dates app or something. Or maybe just looking at the first thing you see when you turn on your phone.

Sam stares at the tablet, shock playing on his face. “It’s *Friday*? And no one thought to tell me?”

“How do you forget to sleep?”

“I work in a lab where the lights are always on...” Sam stands up, and puts the tablet underneath his arm. “Well...” Sam says, “I am going to have a nap. Tell Henry if you feel nausea or like everything’s wrong, because then I will... uh, yeah.”

Then Sam leaves.

Like that clarifies... well fucking anything. Which it frankly, and simply, does not!

Both of them watch Sam leave, before looking at each other.

“Let’s hang out tonight,” Techno says slowly, “We got some stuff to talk about.”

“Techno—”

“You’ll live. Go to an arcade or something.”

“I don’t like arcades.”

“Okay, I’ll get you food. I have... so many questions.”

“Are you paying?”

“Yes.”

“Deal.”

And so...

Okay it's hard to bribe Tommy. But Tommy's fucking hungry, okay?

He sighs and stands up before walking back towards his office.

He runs into Dream, who has a nasty cut on his forehead and several bruises. He's ditched the hero mask and just has one covering the bottom of his face.

"Where's Techno?" Dream says.

He sounds a bit frantic, and Tommy is more than a bit concerned. "Uh, on the medical floor."

Dream nods and continues walking incredibly fast.

Right. Okay.

The day continues on, he's chillin' and living his best life. He emails people frantically, his head remains slightly fuzzy. It's really odd, frankly, not shocking, but it's odd. All his thoughts are being weird.

Listening to his tunes, living his best life.

He's trying to figure out how to politely tell Netflix to fuck off again when he hears Wilbur yelling.

"That's not fair!" Wilbur yells, "I don't care—"

Tommy deems this worthy enough to take off his headphones. So he does so.

“Wilbur.”

“The anatomy is right, we know it’s right. I’ve been asking them for *months* and they’re still saying no.”

“You know I can’t do anything about that,” Sam says softly.

“It’s bullshit!”

Tommy gets out of his seat and walks towards the doorway. He opens his door and peers out. Wilbur is standing in his office, the door open and Sam is sitting on one of the chairs his arms crossed.

“I know, Wil—”

“It’s not fair!”

“Wilbur, I know.”

“This is fucking bullshit!” Wilbur yells, he turns around towards the doorway and his face immediately softens. “Oh. Hi Tommy.”

“Hi, Wilbur.” He says, glancing at Wilbur and then at Sam. “You doin’ alright?”

“Yeah. I’m fine,” Wilbur says.

“You sure?”

“I’m good.”

“Okay...” Tommy says, “I’m gonna head out now, uh— there’s this interview thing lined up for you tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow’s my day off.”

Tommy gives him a look. “I’ve had to come in on Saturdays because of your messes. You’re doing this.”

“Fine,” Wilbur grumbles and Tommy gives him a wide smile.

He stops in front of Techno’s office and knocks on the door. “C’mon idiot, you owe me a burger.”

The diner that they eventually end up at is one that Tommy’s been to before. It’s the type of diner that probably breaks every food safety rule in existence. It’s slightly dodgy, but you *know* they do the best food ever. So it’s a win, win, it’s gonna be fairly cheap and have amazing food.

There’s an odd stain on the floor, and the chair that Tommy’s sitting on is slightly rickety. The table itself has a chip out of it. The menus aren’t laminated, which is a choice but Tommy can respect it.

People are chattering, forks and knives are scraping and it’s very loud. Tommy can barely hear Techno over everyone, which appears to have been Techno’s plan. This is something Tubbo would come up with, talking about something in plain sight where it’s very loud.

“You’re not having a burger. You’re vegetarian.”

“I’m not. I can have beef and pork, just not a lot— I’m not even sure how much of these burgers are beef.”

“Have a chicken sandwich,” Techno says.

Tommy screws up his face, and looks down at the menu. He scans for any type of chicken sandwich and can’t find anything. “They don’t do those at diners, like shredded chicken on a roll?”

“What? No. Like fried chicken on a burger bun.”

“What about a chicken burger?” Tommy screws up his face.

“Burger’s can’t be made out of chicken,” Techno scowls. He picks up his phone and types something, his face drops. “That’s not a burger.”

He shows Tommy what’s on his phone.

It’s a chicken burger.

“It’s crumbed!” Techno drops his phone onto the table. “That makes it like a schnitzel. Not a fucking burger.”

“A schnitzel can not be round. That’s a chicken burger.”

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” Techno says, “That’s a chicken sandwich.”

Tommy’s phone buzzes. He groans, picking it up and putting it on silent. He sets it down on the table face down politely. Because he was taught to pay people attention while having a

meal. If the world is ending then that's a later problem.

"Sandwiches have bread. Two separate bits."

"Cut through the bun the whole way."

"For a *sandwich*? You'd have a roll and not cut it the whole way," Tommy glares at Techno and Techno gives him the most deadpan expression he's seen in a while. "I'm having a hamburger."

"You'll get sick—"

"—I literally won't."

"If you get sick I'll end your entire life."

Tommy looks back down at the menu. "Do it coward— oh loaded fries, fuck yeah. Tech, I want loaded fries."

"They have loaded fries?" Techno attempts to snatch the menu off of Tommy, and Tommy kicks him in the shin. With a lot of force too. Techno yelps and tries to snatch the menu off of Tommy again. "You little shit—"

"Oh they have milkshakes!" Tommy grins. "Okay so I want two loaded fries, one large regular fries and a— caramel milkshake. Holy fuck sweet potato fries, fuck yeah."

"There's no way you can eat all of that."

He's right.

Tommy can eat a lot, but even that is a bit to manage. “Drop the regular fries then you bitch boy. If I wanna eat my bodyweight in various potato, then who are you to judge?”

“Your supervisor.”

“YOU ARE NOT—” Tommy slams his hands on the table. A couple of people glance at them with worried faces. “You’re a bitch boy.”

“Well, I’m supervising a child... therefore—”

“I hate you.” Tommy decides, “You are my least favourite person ever.”

Techno just grins. His teeth look way sharper than Tommy remembers. “Didn’t you call me a brother figure like... yesterday.”

“Did not!” Tommy shrieks. He puts up his hood and pulls on the strings. So that Techno can’t see him and therefore he can melt into the floor and hide from everyone! He rather fancies that idea, and starts sinking down in his seat. “I would never.”

Techno just laughs. “Sure, sure.”

“You sound like Wilbur!”

“Thanks.”

“Not a compliment asshole!” Tommy mumbles.

“Oi, don’t be mean to Wil.”

Tommy peaks out of the small section of his hoodie that isn’t hiding his face. “Ah yes. Because he’s never done anything wrong, not to spite me. Shockingly I’m not a huge fan of his whole anti-Theseus agenda. For reasons I call obvious.”

He hopes that Techno picks up on the fact they’re talking about Theseus in third person. Just in case someone *is* listening in then it’s not overly incriminating. It’s just a hero and an employee talking about Theseus.

Techno pauses, “Look, I’m not saying he’s justified—”

“Oh fuck off you Spectre apologist.”

“But I know why he did what he did. It doesn’t make it okay, not in the slightest.”

Tommy emerges from his hoodie cocoon and glares at Techno. “Floof loves me more than you.”

“What.”

“He loves me more,” Tommy mumbles towards the ground.

“Okay?”

Tommy sinks in his seat and pouts.

“Okay.” Techno sits up a bit taller and his face gets all serious and shit. Serious enough that Tommy is concerned about Techno. Right, okay, they’re being serious now. Tommy puts his

hood down completely and sits up a little bit taller. “Tommy, why the everloving fuck did you put on that supressor?”

“Well— so if it ever happens for real.” He glances around for anyone listening in and he can’t find any. “Also because I’m a dumbass.”

Techno buries his face in his hands.

Fair, if Tommy is being completely honest.

“What I’m about to tell you is a secret, okay?”

Tommy nods.

“They’re being specifically designed for Theseus,” Techno says.

Tommy’s face drops. “H—how do you know that?”

“Dream talked to me about it,” Techno starts bouncing his leg, and Tommy can’t blame him for that because he’s feeling much the same. “They’re putting Dream on the mission of bringing in Theseus. Specifically. Of course the suppressors are faulty and are running off of a handful of assumptions about powers. So you need to know what the fuck happened, and why it only worked for thirty seconds.”

“Have you tested?”

“Yeah—”

“Hi!” Someone says and Tommy looks up at them. Their name tag reads ‘Azalea’ and has a scribbled ‘she/her’ underneath it. With brown hair in a bun and Tommy smiles at her. She grins that customer service smile that Tommy knows too well. “I’m Azalea and I’ll be looking after you table tonight. Would you like any drinks to start with?”

“Caramel milkshake, please,” Tommy says.

“Uh— the same please,” Techno stumbles, because apparently he’s incapable of talking to people. Which... not shocking.

“And have you decided on food, or should I come back in a moment.”

“No, I think we’ve decided,” Tommy says looking at Techno. Techno nods. “Cool. Two loaded fries, two burgers and a regular bowl of sweet potato fries, thank you.” Tommy gives his best smile that says ‘I-used-to-be-there’ and ‘you-will-not-get-kareened’. She seems to understand that and gives a knowing smile back.

“Two caramel milkshakes, two loaded fries, two burgers and a regular bowl of sweet potato fries. Will that be all?”

He looks at Techno, who nods again. “Yes, thank you.”

“That’ll be right out,” she turns and walks off.

Techno watches her leave, before sighing. “Yeah I did it. It didn't knock me out or anything, but my limbs were weird for like... an hour. So I just had to sit there for like an hour. I was so incredibly fucking bored.

“Tech?”

“Yeah?”

“Why did they send Dream after Theseus? Why do they care that much?”

Techno looks a little bit sad, it almost looks like he’s in pain. “Because. Theseus has a set of powers that haven’t been seen before. They want to— figure out whatever that is, and they want him to be a hero. Or, Theseus has become more of a movement than being Theseus himself.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean...” Techno struggles to find the words. “I mean that, there’s loyalty in Logstedchire for Theseus. Like... there would probably be riots if anything happens to him, and then they can’t keep control of the population in Logsted.”

“So make him a hero?”

“Make him a hero,” Techno confirms, “Then make him lie to the public about this being his choice. That will either make them turn against him, or make some people think the heroes aren’t so bad.”

“What would they do, if they caught Theseus?”

Techno looks more in pain. He opens his mouth and closes it again. “I— depends on a lot of things. What is my opinion or the official statement they gave Dream?”

Tommy realises, with a sort of horrified feeling that Techno never had... well a Techno. He never got someone who was willing to fight for him to remain a vigilante. He had people who would fight for him, yeah, but they all thought they knew what was best for him. Techno might be the only person who understands him almost completely when it comes to this. The fear of getting caught, the fear. Everything.

Techno’s a version of Tommy that got caught.

“Your version.”

“Well, with the amendment they’ll probably threaten his friends and family with Pandora’s. This is after he’ll get interrogated for several days, probably about the identities of the other Logstedchire four. Then I reckon they’ll give him the choice of either he becomes a hero, or anyone who aided him will go to Pandora’s, but he’ll be free.”

“Oh.” Tommy says quietly.

“And it won’t be a guaranteed spot, he’ll have to pass all the tests. But they’ll make those as difficult as possible without it being painfully illegal. It’s not gonna be easy.”

“Okay...” Tommy tries to process it all.

Basically he’s fucked. There’s no nicer way to say it. If they’re sending *Dream* after him, then he’s completely fucked. He might as well pack up and go home now. Dream likes Theseus— but he probably likes his job more.

Cool. Tommy’s royally fucked.

“What did they tell Dream?”

Techno manages to have a bit of humour in his voice. “That Theseus would be ‘ *held until further notice* ’.”

Tommy throws his head back and cackles. “And anyone believes that?”

“Nope,” Techno also laughs, “They’re about as reliable as my leg.”

“You alright?”

“Yeah,” Techno nods. “Apparently decided after years of using the wrong leg for exercise that *now* is the time to fail on me. Scar tissue, I think, had a flare up. It’s not a good time for me to be running.”

Tommy has a terrible idea. He grins, and leans slightly more towards the table, like a businessman making a deal. A terrible deal, but a funny one nonetheless. Techno sighs, apparently he can also tell this is a terrible idea.

He smiles a bit brighter, “Techno. Have you ever used your leg as a weapon?”

“What? No.”

“Okay. Why?”

“Because it’s not practical at all.”

“Use it like a bat!” Tommy grins.

Tommy’s phone buzzes.

He sighs and puts it on silent.

Wait, didn’t he just put it on silent—

Must’ve missed the button.

He puts it back on silent.

“It’s like always attached to you. It’s perfect.”

Azalea walks over, carrying two milkshakes. She puts them both in front of Tommy and Techno. “Food will be out in just a moment.”

“Thank you—”

She walks off again.

Tommy sips at his milkshake, it’s surprisingly good.

“Oh fuck, we have to tip, don’t we?” Techno says. “How much are you supposed to tip?”

“ *You can* tip at least fifty percent.”

“Isn’t it twenty?”

“You’re rich. The total’s gonna be like fifty bucks.”

“So what, tip twenty-five?”

“Yeah,” Tommy nods.

“How the fuck do I do the maths?”

“Half it.” Tommy deadpans. “You fuckin’ idiot.”

“... in my defence I haven't done school since like year four.”

“Huh?”

“Busy in a fighting ring, and then being a hero.”

“Techno, do you know how to find the unknown side of a right-angled triangle?”

“Huh. No, why would I need to know that?”

“What about the symbolism in ‘The Great Gatsby’?”

“No? Why would I need to—”

“What about— the function of a rubber duck?”

“Is that a Harry Potter reference?”

“Yup. What about... water cycles, do you know what a water cycle is?”

“How... water cycles?”

Tommy laughs, throwing his head back. “This is amazing. Holy fuck. Did any of the heroes do school?”

“Uh— Phil went back when he quit, before he was brought back in again.”

“Did any of the heroes finish highschool?”

Techno pauses. “Phil... maybe Sam.”

Tommy laughs, “Holy fuck I have more formal education than most of the fucking heroes. That’s wild. Who let that happen?”

“Dunno—”

Azalea returns, this time with several chip baskets which she puts on the table. Tommy mumbles a thank you and she walks off again for their burgers. Tommy starts picking at the sweet potato fries.

“Do you know Johanna from HR?” Tommy asks.

“I am pretty sure that’s not how you say it.”

Tommy glares. “Do you know her?”

“No?”

“She’s a bitch,” Tommy says, “Holy fuck I hate her. She takes all the printing paper from the PR department printers to her own floor. Like why would someone do that, what the fuck is wrong with her? Why would someone do that, why did they think that was a good idea? Then I’m in a rush to print this article that came out because I want to systematically break it down and then I have to run all the way down to like Quackity’s and Sam’s floor, which I don’t wanna do because then SBI is trending on Twitter and I really needed a statement out as quickly as possible.”

Techno squints at him. “I understood like three of those words.”

“A story came out about you trying to kill the president.”

“That’s not new information.”

“No, but everytime Twitter realises something new they lose their fucking mind over it. So I needed a statement quickly.”

“Wait, are you actually good at your job?” Techno says.

Tommy just looks at him. “Are you fucking kidding me? Yes I’m good at my job, I get paid the big bucks for a reason.”

“I... I thought you were like... *okay* at your job.”

“I’m good at my job,” Tommy says. “I’ve been brought in for big meetings before? Like after the gala and Fundy? I made the decision about the statement that was going to be used?”

Techno looks down at his loaded fries and picks at a couple. “You’re like an infant, why are you actually good at your job?”

“Because.”

“That’s not a reason.”

Two burgers get placed on the table, and Tommy thanks Azalea and gives her a big smile. She nods and walks off.

Tommy tucks into the burger. It's pretty good if he's being completely honest. He demolishes that way quicker than he thought he would, and then he moves on to the loaded fries, which are also amazing.

Good food.

Probably going to get food poisoning somehow, but still really good food.

“So, just sayin’ I think you should consider using your leg in a fight. Just beat the shit outta someone with it.”

Techno just looks at him.

“Like you could just—”

Tommy's phone buzzes again.

How the fuck?

He picks it up.

Oh it's Schlatt, that can wait a moment or two.

He thinks he's earned a chance to just be able to chill with Techno. Now they're done being serious. And Tommy still has to think about what the fuck the entire uh— Dream thing means.

Probably not great for him.

Considering Dream's probably the most competent hero (don't tell Phil he said that), but he also likes Theseus. So maybe it'll turn out alright.

He hopes that at least.

"Did you put that on silent?"

"Yeah, must not be workin' or something."

His phone buzzes again.

He literally just put it on silent.

Fuck's sake Schlatt.

He picks up the phone, actually accepting the call and sighing. "Schlatt, the fuck do you want?"

"Tommy where the fuck are you?"

"At a diner with Techno, why are you—"

"Fuck! Tommy listen to me, okay, I found the mole. Then I kept tracing and I found who I think is the ringleader of the fighting ring who sent people after Tubbo."

“Holy fuck,” Tommy almost falls out of his seat.

Techno looks concerned.

“Tommy, I think he’s in the diner with you. His phone location says he’s there.”

Tommy spins around quickly.

“Don’t look around,” Schlatt hisses and Tommy turns back around. “Techno’s with you right?”

“Yeah.”

“Well fuck.” Schlatt sighs, “Okay. You’re gonna have to look around.”

“Tommy...” Techno says, “What’s wrong?”

Tommy stands up slowly, holding the phone to his ear. “The fighting ring-leader,” Tommy hisses.

He watches Techno’s face become absolutely terrified for a few seconds. To the point where it’s almost unnerving to see Techno like that, his eyes go wide and his mouth falls open. He stares for a long moment.

“He’s— here?” Techno’s voice shakes.

“I think so. Schlatt, now what?”

“I don’t fucking know, I’m not a spy. Go look around or something—”

Tommy holds the phone to his ear, and he tries to ignore that Techno’s hands are shaking. Techno looks calmer, but not a lot.

“I’ll be back.”

“Okay.”

Tommy turns around, taking a few steps to try and find anyone he recognises. It’s been a while, and he probably barely recognises the man. Even if they were straight up staring at each other.

“Turn around.” Schlatt says.

Tommy spins around.

At one of the tables, laughing, is the ringleader. Tommy recognises him easily, with long shaggy hair and the general punchable face.

“Fuck.” Tommy says.

Then the man looks up at him.

They make eye contact, and Tommy can see the recognition in his eyes.

Oh. Fuck.

Chapter End Notes

TODAY'S MEME IS DONE BY OUR BELOVED EMOTIONAL SUPPORT
RACCOON PIXEL!



Chapter Summary:

- - Tommy realises Wilbur knows his age. Schlatt calls him at a dodgy time and is like “IS TUBBO GOOD?” Tubbo is not good and so punches Tommy in the face. Tommy is offended, he tells Schlatt that a ringleader hurt Tubbo. Schlatt is like “gimme 24 hours”
 - Ranboo & Tommy have ice cream and talk about Tubbo.
 - Goes to work, Phil sits him down and is like “fam”, Tommy can’t deal with a direct question so he spills everything about his age.
 - Sam wants Tommy in the lab. Tommy goes to the lab. Because he’s a dumbass he puts on a power suppressor and passes the fuck out
 - Hospital. Fluff. Greek myths. Tommy gets angsty over a potential test of his powers, coz trauma I guess. That’s fun. Techno’s like “chill” he does not, and then he does. Yada yada...
 - OH YEAH Techno & Tommy go out to eat and talk about buns & chicken sandwiches vs. burgers because Americans are weird
 - He gets a call from Schlatt, and Schlatt reveals the ringleader is... YKNOW IN THE BUILDING

ARTS:

[Tommy struggling with his powers](#) by Starry Soda

Noot Noot did a [hilariously accurate Chapter 28 summary](#)

All of these lovely pieces were done by Rozy, THANK YOU! [Tina Tommy being a badass](#), [fallinggg](#), ALSO THIS, [LOOK AT IT](#) /pos

[Techno on de floor](#), [tina!purpled being a dingus](#), [purpled climbing up a roof](#) by ProblemSolved

Aeth did all of these pog pieces and more (I ran outta space), [power hand!](#), [Theseus Merch](#)

[Doodle 1](#), [Doodle 2](#), by Sorfrost (they did more, I just can't fit 'em all)

Vin did [tina!merch](#) and [another tina!merch](#)

[FLOOF WITH A ROCKET LAUNCHER](#) by Sam, who did more, I just ran outta space, but they're all so cool and well done!

Jay drew the [tina character's eyesss](#), (warning, eye contact and imagery)

[Tina!tommy](#) by Tommy

See you all for part 2, where the chapter title gets it's name from!

In Which Tommy McFucking Snaps || Part 2 ||

Chapter Summary

tommy makes the anger stage of grief 1000% funnier

techno has trauma, until he doesn't
tommy is angry, until he's not

tommy's just a kid, and kids just want to be safe, only techno seems to understand that.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: *graphic depiction of violence*, electrocution, convulsions / seizures

Chapter summary at the end, let me know if I've missed anything!

I listened to 'Nights Like These' by Pigeon Pit the entire time I wrote this.
So I guess if you want a song to go with it? I just like it because it's a song that sounds like panic. It's becoming a problem in my life /pos

This chapter's only 5k, next chapter will make up for it I promise. I just didn't want to write 20k words at once.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Oh. Fuck.

Tommy scrambles backwards, before pushing around someone and over to Techno.

Techno looks up at him.

Tommy fishes for his wallet. Grabbing out a fifty dollar note and slamming it on the table.
“We gotta go, we gotta— we’re going. Come on.”

Techno blinks at him.

“Schlatt what’s this guy’s name?”

Schlatt pauses. “*It’s Bartholomew.*”

Tommy doesn’t say anything for a long moment. He just sighs quietly.

“I refuse to die to someone called fucking Bartholomew. Techno, we gotta go.”

“Well I can’t exactly run can I!” Techno manages to stand up and walks at an almost leisurely speed towards the door.

“Well fucking run!” Tommy says.

Techno does not run.

Ah. Good ol’ fucking *Bartholomew* is standing there are the door. He’s smiling too, some sort of twisted smile that Tommy hates more than anything. They’re in public, can Tommy kill a man in public?

Tommy is the one who moves in front of Techno.

“Move,” he snarls.

Fucking Barty Party over there, hums.

He knocks Tommy's phone out of his hand, before stepping on it with a fucking wide grin on his face.

Well. Fuck.

Why does everyone hate him having a phone? Next one is going out of the SBI budget he swears—

He laughs, a sickening laugh that makes Techno pale and Tommy glare and grit his teeth. It's a bad laugh, one that grills on his ears and makes him want to smash a glass bottle against his head.

Tommy is literally going to blow his cover as Theseus if this fucker isn't careful. He grits his teeth and glares.

“Nice to see you again Blade, how's being a hybrid going? Someone told me it's really fucking painful—”

Tommy looks around, the table closest to the door has a drinking glass just on the table. It's pretty empty and within reaching distance. He glances at the glass, then at the man. He's not sure if physics allows this.

He's pretty sure the force he'd need to smash this glass would break someone's skull.

He does have powers that could shatter a glass though.

He picks up the glass before bring it up towards fucking *Bartholomew's* head, what a fucking shit name. Who the fuck even thought of that? Then he tightens his grip, and lets go of the glass.

At the exact same moment the glass explodes, and hopefully no one can see the red sparks falling off of the glass.

That was cool.

Tommy should do theatre again for that, because that was fucking amazing.

The man just blinks at him.

“Not as scared this time, asshole,” Tommy snarls.

Then he decides he can probably never go back to this diner again anyway, he might as well make this count for something. Tommy *will* throw down in public, especially with the asshole who hurt Tubbo.

So Tommy grins.

He fucking punches the guy in the jaw. To a point where it almost hurts his hand, and he's gotten pretty good at punching people. Fucking *Bartholomew* — who names their kid that— stumbles to the side.

Oh they really gotta go.

Tommy grabs Techno's wrist and basically drags him out of the diner.

They have a few seconds of a head start. Tommy drags Techno down the street for a bit longer. It's early evening now, it's still a little bit light, probably because of the fact it's Summer and rudely Summer is rather bright.

Fuckin' rude, if Tommy does say so himself.

They walk a couple more buildings down, and Tommy hears someone yelling.

Okay yup.

He drags the both of them down part of an alley.

Techno is also limping a worrying amount— oh yeah, his prosthetic is fucking him up.

MAYBE IF SOMEONE HAD GOTTEN A BETTER LEG THEN THEY WOULDN'T BE IN THIS SITUATION—

Tommy hisses before turning around. Okay, fuckin' Barty Party isn't there. They have some time.

"He's going to kill us," Techno says, really cheerily.

"Okay, calm down. He can't kill us without our consent."

"W—what?"

"I'm a minor, I can't legally die unless I consent."

Tommy scans around the alley. It's a pretty small thing. Thankfully with a fire escape so they can get up there. There's a dumpster in the furthest corner which Tommy stares at for a moment. Okay, he can work with that.

There's a pipe or something leaning against the wall, which Tommy picks up before twisting in his hand like he's trying to figure it out. He looks back over at the fire escape, before grabbing Techno's wrist.

"Get onto the roof." Tommy says.

Techno appears to think that's a good idea because he pulls himself up onto the first part before climbing the ladder. Alright then, Techno can handle that. Ideally a bit quicker so Tommy can haul his ass up there.

"Fuck," Tommy mutters, "Techno get off the ladder. Behind the dumpster."

Techno stares at him for a moment, there's something calmer in his eyes now. Something not quite the pure panic look he had a moment ago but he's still clearly freaked out. Tommy feels... too calm.

But Techno relents quicker than he normally would.

He drops to the ground and Tommy hauls himself up onto the ladder.

He climbs a few rungs before he realises he might need to go a bit faster otherwise he will get dragged to the ground. This (shockingly) enough gives him the motivation he needs to climb a bit faster.

Someone yells, and Tommy can't be bothered to try and hear what they're saying. He knows who it is and he can't be bothered to even try to hear them.

You gotta go, you gotta go. A voice sings in his head. He's pretty sure there's a TikTok sound like this. Ranboo was probably listening to them on repeat again, he has this weird habit of doing that. He'll see one sound he likes and then watch like seven TikToks with that sound—

Bad timing.

He's being chased up a ladder. His life lies in him climbing up this ladder quickly and not thinking about Ranboo and why he's a terrible Tik-Toker and deserves to go to jail for his sins.

A hand wraps around his ankle— that was quick.

Tommy kicks his other leg, it hits something and the grip on his ankle loosens.

He scampers up the ladder. Hauling himself up onto the top of the building.

Okay—

Not a single time has being on a roof gone wrong for him. He knows what he's doing (he doesn't). And he's going to win this fight (statistically unlikely).

Okay.

Tommy flexes his hand, before swinging the pipe. It's heavy but not too heavy.

Bartholomew hauls himself up onto the roof before swinging at Tommy straight away. Man's did not hesitate—

Tommy blocks it with the pipe and Bartholomew cries out in pain. Weak ass bitch.

Tommy responds by swinging it and good ol' Barty manages to duck out of the way.

You're pulling punches. A voice that sounds a bit too much like Wisp for his liking chides. Or maybe Purpled—he's not great with voices.

He is great with getting distracted and then punched.

He staggers back a couple of steps holding the side of his face. Before swinging the pipe to make distance.

It does that well.

Okay, plan— Tommy would love to have one of those.

Bartholomew kicks out his leg.

Tommy grabs the ankle of the outstretched leg and yanks it upwards.

He hits the ground with a thump and Tommy points the pipe at his throat like it's a sword.

"What the fuck did you do to Tubbo?"

"Who?"

"Don't play dumb with me, you fuck—"

With a yell, Bartholomew grabs the pipe, twisting it out of Tommy's hands before hitting him in the chest with it.

Fucking ow.

"What did you do to Tubbo?" Tommy yells, ignoring the pain, because that's so much easier.
"You fucking bastard."

"I don't know who Tubbo is!"

"Fucker—"

He ducks out of the way of the pipe being swung at him, before glancing over his shoulder.

Fuck no.

Too close to the edge, he's not having that character arc again, he hasn't moved over the trauma of the first one—

He jumps at Barty (what a fucking dumb name), and tackles him around the middle.

They both hit the ground, and Tommy manages to grab the pipe back before hitting it against the ground next to his head.

You're pulling punches.

Tommy ignores it.

Bartholomew sneers, "You're protecting that monster."

"I'm protecting my brother!" Tommy yells and punches him in the face for the fun of it. "You fucker—"

Tommy hits the pipe into the ground and a chunk of concrete comes loose. Bartholomew whimpers because he's a bitch.

"Listen to me—"

He gets punched in the face and is shoved to the ground.

"Why a change of heart?" Bartholomew says with a sick smile. "Last time you were throwing Blade back at us—"

Tommy summons his powers, before throwing him against the wall.

He hits his head, but manages to stumble a little way away from the wall.

Tommy does not give a single fuck, he gets onto his feet before walking towards this piece of shit waste of space.

He kicks him in the chest, against the wall. He hopes that something snaps, he doesn't care what.

Maybe his ribs.

Tommy can give him some advice.

A moment later he swings the pipe at his face, he turns his head but a long gash opens up on his forehead.

Tommy goes to swing again. This time he doesn't hit him, but a chunk of brick flies off in some direction he can't be bothered to watch.

He summons his powers, before sending Bartholomew sailing over to the other side of the roof.

There's a thump and something cracking, and Tommy smiles at that.

He lifts the piece of shit off the ground, before slamming him back into the ground.

For shits and giggles he does it twice more, just because he's in a silly goofy mood.

Hopefully something is more permanently broken. And the doctors are going to struggle to figure out what to do with the injuries once Tommy's done.

"You piece. Of. Shit." Tommy snarls.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" He manages, wheezing for breath. There's blood flowing from his nose. "You sick fuck—"

Tommy kicks him in the face.

"Because you keep hurting people important to me, and I am sick of watching the people I love hurt. What did you do to Tubbo?"

"I don't know a Tubbo!"

"You lying fuck!" Tommy yells, he grabs the guy by the hair, yanking him up onto his feet and walking him towards the side of the building.

It's not a fatal fall, right?

Bartholomew appears to figure out what's happening because he claws at Tommy's arm and Tommy cries out, letting him go.

A foot is kicked into his chest, and Tommy staggers back. Well. Fuck. That wasn't supposed to happen.

Tommy raises his hands, before throwing them to the side, Bartholomew follows them and topples on the side of the building.

Wilbur is really good at hurting people, so Tommy might as well take a leaf out of his book.

A dodgy book, but one that really fucking injures people. Emotionally and physically!

Tommy almost sighs at the irony. Grabbing good ol' Barty by the hair, Tommy almost laughs.

Then pushes the man backwards and he topples over the side of the roof.

There's a thud on the ground, and Tommy is legitimately curious to whether he's dead or not.

He peers over the edge, and no, good old Barty is still living his best life. Looks like he's in pain judging by the agonising noises that he's making and the fact that there's a lot of blood on the ground.

Wilbur would be proud.

Theseus and Spectre's team up appears more likely than Tommy thought.

Tommy stares across the skyline. Okay, Tommy jumps off the side of the building. Doing a little thing called a density shift to break his fall.

It doesn't hurt and that in itself is pretty amazing.

It might hurt later, but right now Tommy feels pretty fucking incredible.

He kicks the guy in the side of the face, he's not using as much force as he could. He doesn't wanna like... kill the guy, that's gonna be hard to explain and put a huge target on his back.

Fuckin' Barty groans and Tommy gives a big smile, crouching down so he's at his level.

"Why the fuck did you send people after Tubbo?" Tommy spits.

He doesn't get much of a reaction, apart from a sneer and spitting blood onto the ground. That probably isn't a good time, but Tommy doesn't give a single shit.

This time he kicks the guy in the chest, and he falls back onto the ground.

Techno's standing back.

Which is good. He doesn't need to deal with this, Tommy has it under control. Something that truthfully can say, which he's still sorta getting used to.

It's nice to be the one who knows what he's doing for once.

The ringleader snorts, looking at Techno. "Fuckin' pathetic that piece of shit is. How was he the best fighter—"

Tommy does not hesitate to grab the man by the hair, and slam the back of his skull into the ground.

There's a noise that means Tommy pauses for a moment, glancing at the bleeding and very, very bruised man that's still on the ground. How much blood does this guy have? Tommy kicks the guy in the rib.

"Get this you piece of shit," Tommy snarls. "You don't get to hurt my family, you lost that right long ago." He kicks him in the ribs again, and realises he's not going to do *anything* to stop this guy from hurting. "You're never going to fucking hurt them again, hear me?"

No response.

He kicks him in the side again. Hard. Something might crack under his foot, he's not quite sure. "Do you fucking hear me?"

Favourite piece of shit, Barty Party nods.

"Okay, cool!" Tommy smiles before crouching down. He grabs the pipe back off the ground and prods it under his chin like a sword. It is not a sword, but a sword would probably do less damage than what Tommy's about to do.

Fucker's hands are shaking.

Good.

Tommy's hands are surprisingly still, the slight tremor they usually have is basically gone.

“Now we've established that. Why the fuck did you send your people after Tubbo?”

“Tubbo?” He manages to spit out, between a mix of saliva and blood which he spits on the ground a second later. Which is fucking gross. Ew.

Tommy glares, using the pipe like a sword and pushing it forwards more. “Don't play dumb with me, you stupid fuck. You know Tubbo, why did you send people after him?”

A beat of silence.

“I don't know who that is—”

Tommy draws the pipe back, before swinging it at Bartholomew's face. It hits and makes a sickening noise as the metal hits flesh. But Tommy ignores it, even when the fucker cries out in pain.

“Don't play dumb with me you fucking asshole, I know you know who Tubbo is. Now tell me, what the fuck did you need to know that was good enough to get a firework shot at my best friend?”

A blank stare.

Tommy swings back the pipe over his shoulder.

Bartholomew's eyes go a bit wider, and Tommy swings the pipe again. This time it hits the shoulder, and he still cries out in pain like a pathetic little bitch. For a man who threw kids in an arena to fight each other, he's weak as fuck.

"Tubbo?" Tommy yells, "Short kid, brown hair? Made half of the tech you still use in the fighting rings—"

His face drops.

"I know you know him," Tommy keeps his voice low, glancing over his shoulder at Techno who's just standing there. "And you're gonna tell me exactly what you found out, or I'm going to leave you a bloody stain on the ground. You got that?"

"I don't know—"

Tommy grabs the man by the hair, slamming his head against the wall. Once, twice, three times.

Blood starts pouring down from the side of his head and Tommy lets him go. He blinks a few times, eyes unfocused and Tommy just sighs.

He forgot just how much a human body can deal with before it snaps, way more than he fucking thought. Wisp was a fuckin' liar. People are so much stronger than Tommy remembers. And he remembers well.

"Make sure you don't snap 'em too far," Wisp had said one night, lazing on the couch with a mischievous grin on his face. "Otherwise you're not going to get a second of info outta 'em."

Well fuck.

"Okay," Tommy says softer again.

Bartholomew looks so bad that Tommy almost feels sorry. His nose is bleeding and his lip is split in two places. His nose also looks really bent out of shape and wrong. There's more cuts on his face and bruises littering almost every patch of skin.

His jaw doesn't look like it's supposed to be shaped like that, there is... a lot of blood falling from his head, and that's not even counting his ribs or limbs.

Maybe this guy should be dead, but is just a fucking cockroach piece of shit who needs to encroach on everything because Tommy can't have shit going his way apparently, otherwise that's a hate crime.

"One last chance," Tommy whispers, "Why did you send people after Tubbo?"

He has a concussion.

Tommy knows he has a concussion and probably can barely think through the pain, Tommy's been there before with injuries about this bad. You can't really think about much, let alone speaking.

He knows this. Tommy knows this.

He knows good ol' Barty can't answer him.

And there's something sick and twisted in his mind that he can't quite contain as he swings the pipe over his head. Ready to bash in someone's skull with it.

Tommy's killed before.

He can do it again.

He twists the pipe in his hand. Before raising it.

Then he swings.

The pipe is wrenched out of his hands, and Tommy turns around. A mass of sparks fly onto the floor, and Tommy goes to scream.

Techno's holding the pipe, his eyes wide as he takes a few steps backwards. Almost stumbling over his own feet.

Tommy raises his hand.

Techno for a split second looks terrified, as Tommy raises his hand. His eyes go incredibly wide and his hands tighten their grip around the pipe which is covered in blood and chunks of flesh that Tommy does not want to think about too hard.

"No." Techno says.

"What do you mean, no?" Tommy scoffs, "Give me the pipe— let me finish this."

"No!" Techno yells, "I'm not letting you kill someone, you don't need that on your conscience."

"I already have it on my conscious—"

"Not like this," Techno whispers, and his eyes aren't quite here, or anywhere else either. "I'm guessing you didn't beat someone to death with a pipe before?"

He hadn't.

It had been fear fuelled and panicked, with little control over what he did. He just... sorta did it. Not because he wanted to, but because he had to.

This is different.

He knows this is different but he doesn't care.

He doesn't care anymore.

"Tommy," Techno says softly, "You do not want to kill someone else, please, please— trust me on this. Not out of rage, not because you want to." Techno puts the pipe on the ground and slowly approaches Tommy. "Tommy," he says gently, and Tommy hates how gentle it is because they both know he doesn't deserve that. "Please. If you never trust me on anything again, trust me on this."

The ringleader laughs in the background.

"Weak," he somehow manages.

Tommy whirls around, "What did you fucking say to him—"

"Tommy," Techno says, "Please. It doesn't matter."

"It fucking does, he can't just say—"

Techno glances at Bartholomew. "He's just a man who's afraid that his actions have consequences. He is not you, you're better than he's ever been or ever will be. And no one is dying today."

Then the ringleader manages to laugh, clutching his stomach, which must fucking hurt.
“Who’s the one you killed, Blade? Squid, right—”

Techno’s face drops.

Tommy turns around and grabs the man by the hair, before slamming his head into the wall.
It makes a worrying sound.

Once. Twice. And there’s more blood, and the sound that hurts his fucking ears at this point.

Then Tommy’s picked up off the ground.

Out of habit he lets Bartholomew go. He kicks his legs and tries to fight against Techno’s grip but they both know that’s going to be really fucking difficult. He actually screams, fighting more and Techno does not let go for anything.

“LET ME GO.” Tommy screams.

“I can’t do that, Tommy.”

“Let me do this!” Tommy yells.

“I won’t.”

Tommy stops kicking his legs and goes limp, Techno is still holding onto him. Not too dissimilar from holding an angry child. Tommy tries to break free again, for good luck at this point and doesn’t succeed even in the slightest.

“I said I’d keep them safe,” Tommy whispers, “What am I if I can’t even do that?”

“You’re a kid,” Techno says. “It’s not your job to save everyone. You’re a kid Tommy—you’re just... you’re just a kid.”

“Who promised I’d keep my friends safe and I fucking couldn’t even do that—”

Tears prick Tommy’s eyes, he’s not sure if they’re out of sadness or pure fucking frustration but it seems like a terrible mix of the both. He bites his lip in a sad attempt to stop himself from crying.

It does not work.

“Fuck,” Tommy whispers, and the tears start rolling down his face.

“Hey,” Techno says in the voice which is somehow laced with both unwavering honesty and trust and everything good about Techno. “You’re okay kid, you’re okay. We’re alright. Everything’s okay.”

Tommy opens his mouth to say something.

All that comes out is a strangled sob.

Techno kindly stops holding him off the ground, and Tommy opens his mouth to say anything which he can use to defend himself, if even slightly. But... there’s not much he can say that’ll defend himself.

So instead he starts crying.

Techno sighs, and pulls Tommy into a hug.

It's warm and safe and very little goes wrong when you have a Techno hug. More tears spill from Tommy's eyes, and he tries not to start sobbing. It's an awkward time to start sobbing at best.

"Please," Tommy whispers again.

He doesn't really want to hurt the guy, he's not sure why he says that. Like maybe somehow him saying that might actually make him a good friend, if he wanted to change something and then couldn't.

Techno doesn't say anything, they both know Tommy's lost whatever internal battle this is. He goes limp slightly, and some weight that he's probably been carrying for a long time leaves him.

"I—"

"Are a kid," Techno says. "Okay? You're a kid."

"What, did you do this when you were a kid?"

Techno manages to almost smile for a second. "I wish beating the shit out of an abuser was the worst thing I did as a kid." Techno hugs Tommy a bit tighter for a second before letting him go.

He crouches down so him and Bartholomew are looking at each other dead in the eye. One of them is a lot more bruised and bloody, and could die... maybe they should call an ambulance.

No one would believe that Tommy beat the shit out of anyone anyway.

Techno tilts his head, something that Floof does when he's curious about something. Techno studies his face closely for a moment before humming.

"I used to be scared, to look you in the eye," Techno says slowly, like the words are almost too big for him and he needs to break them down just to say them. "I still am, my hands are shaking." He holds his hands out in front of him, and sure enough, they are shaking— and a lot.

Bartholomew just looks at him, with the contempt he can manage between his injuries and bruised face, and the fact that he probably can't do much with his swollen face and the fact his jaw is probably out of shape.

"Huh," Techno almost laughs, not quite, but the sentiment is there. "You really are just a pathetic old man who takes joy in other people's pain." Techno hums, "If I was a worse person I'd hit you. You made me a hybrid, I could probably kill you with a punch you know?"

"Freak," he manages to spit out somehow and Techno raises an eyebrow.

"Heard about Heracles and Chiron?" Techno asks, "Chiron had trained many heroes before Heracles, Achilles, Perseus, Jason, Ajax— but Heracles was the one who killed him. Accident... put him in so much pain that Chiron begged to be made mortal again, to put him out of his misery."

Techno just smiles, before patting Bartholomew on the head.

"See?" Is what Techno eventually says. "Everything is fine kid—"

Tommy sees it before Techno does.

A glint of shining metal from... somewhere.

Bartholomew goes to lunge forwards.

Techno's eyes go wide.

And Tommy throws out both of his hands.

Sparks fly everywhere, showering the ground and Tommy grabs Techno by the back of the hoodie and yanks him backwards. He lands on his ass and looks up to glare at Tommy. Before looking back at Bartholomew ready for a fight.

He's not fighting.

He's dead still. Holding what looks like a sharp chunk of metal in his hands.

His eyes are glowing red.

Bright red.

Tommy looks at Techno, then back at Bartholomew.

His eyes are completely blank.

Like there's nothing there, and he's somewhere completely different that is not here.

Tommy takes a few steps back like that can distance himself.

He's still.

“Techno—”

“What the fuck is that?”

“I don’t know!”

“What did you do?”

“I don’t fucking know! I threw out my hands because I was worried—”

“ *What the fuck did you do?* ”

“*I don’t fucking know!*”

Techno hesitates for a long moment, before getting up onto his feet and holding an arm out so Tommy can’t get past. It’s a sweet gesture, but really fucking does not help with anything going on.

“Tommy—”

“I don’t know what I did.”

He’s perfectly still, and Tommy swears there are tears streaming down his face. What the fuck is this?

Then he starts twitching.

Tommy stares for a moment.

It's just little twitches, nothing to be worried about— right, right? This is fine. Surely this is fine, this needs to be fine or Tommy will have a breakdown. That is both a threat and a promise for his future plans.

“Tommy?” Techno says, “What the fuck did you do—”

“I don't know!”

“How do you not know?”

“I don't know what my powers do!” Tommy yells back.

Bartholomew's eyes are glowing red at this point, not a huge amount, but there's a clear light based off of the way the shadows twist differently to how they had been for almost the entire time leading up to this.

Tears are streaming down his face, and Tommy has no fucking idea what he's supposed to do about it. He stares for a longer moment, before Techno's eyes go a bit wider.

“Electricity.” Techno says.

“Huh?”

“Electricity,” Techno repeats, “He's twitching— did you electrocute the guy?”

“I don’t fucking know!”

“Well me neither!”

Bartholomew... locks up, that’s the best way to describe it. He locks up and falls to the side, his eyes are wide and open as tears still stream from his eyes. His eyes were unblinking, boring themselves into Tommy’s eyes somehow.

Techno mutters something Tommy can’t quite catch in his panic, and then takes a few steps towards Bartholomew. He checks his pulse, before looking at Tommy and nodding. “He’s alive.”

“What did I do?” Tommy whispers.

“I don’t know.” Techno takes a few steps back. “We’re going to have to call an ambulance—”

“What, no way? I’ll get arrested for assault.”

Techno gives him a long look. “If anyone’s getting arrested for this it’s me. The violent piglin hybrid, I’ll take the blame. We can’t let him die.”

Tommy hates that he agrees, they can’t let him die. Because then Tommy is even more of a terrible person and he already has all of this fucking bullshit on his mind. He doesn’t need to add another death to that.

Then Bartholomew snaps out of it, and he looks up at Tommy with something that Tommy would call pure hate. “What the fuck did you do? You freak of nature—”

His eyes glow red again and he starts convulsing.

It is. Not a pretty sight.

His limbs flail around, and hit into the walls like they're not there.

The noise is horrifying. The thumps and the fact there's no screaming. Just dead silence with nothing to break up the thumps of limbs slamming into walls or the ground.

Techno mutters something under his breath again, and Tommy shuffles back with wide eyes.

Then Tommy's head feels light.

Like everything's been spun on his head, a pounding headache starts at the back of his eyes. Like there's something slamming itself into his skull time and time again, it's head-splitting and Tommy can't focus on anything.

He's somewhere aware of Bartholomew crying, and Techno being stressed out of his fucking mind, and the cars in the distance and the birds that he can hear somewhere and the red sparks hitting the ground consistently.

What the everloving fuck is this?

His head hurts.

His eyes go fuzzy.

Everything's a blur in front of him, Techno's a vaguely pink blur and the rest is a sad smudge of dull colours that he can't tell apart with his pounding headache.

He's gonna pass out.

Should probably warn Tech about that.

“Tech—” Tommy manages, “I think I’m gonna pass out.”

“Wait, what?”

And Tommy, true to his word, passes out.

He really needs to stop doing that—

Chapter End Notes

Today's meme presented to you by Rozy!



Chapter Summary:

- Tommy smashes a glass next to the ringmaster's head
- MCFUCKING RUNS. ONTO A BUILDING, TECHNO HIDES BEHIND A DUMPSTER
- Fight scene. Pow. Pow. Pow.
- Bartholomew (The ring master) insults Techno, Tommy does not stand for that so there is a FITE
- Tommy McFucking loses it, before kicking Barty off a roof (Spectre kinnie) yada yada, tries to kill him. Techno is like "BRO WTF NO" and then he almost gets stabbed and Tommy's powers freak the fuck out and do SOMETHING to barty that means he's NOT having a good time.
- New trauma power unlocked
- In conclusion: Tommy's upgrading. Many more levels and we'll get his traumatic past!

Tina-Toks: (yes I am calling them that)

A [summary of Tommy at work](#) by [Solis](#)

[CHAPTER 29 BE LIKE](#) : by [Nadine](#)

[Tina!Wilbur is a tory truthing](#) by [Raccoon](#)

AND [COOL.KIDS.STUFFS](#) OUT HERE POPPING OFF AS ALWAYS: [Tommy_@.Henry_](#), [Netflix vs. Tommy beef](#), and last (but not least) [Tommy flippin' Wilbur](#). They also do way more! So go give 'em a follow, they're all hilarious

Some Arts!:

Artemis did a [cheeky floof](#) and a [grumpy Floof](#)

ROZY POPPED OFF (as always) with [golden duo](#) and a [warehouse sketch](#) (warning knives & guns)

[FLOOF WITH A NUKE & KNIFE](#) BY TIRED

Nadine drew a [super sweet Theseus drawing](#)

A [chapter 29 sketch](#) by Noot Noot our beloved

[Elysium flower painting](#) by [Jinx](#), which I love a lot

Thanks for reading, I'll see you next time <333

Next chapter: Techno POV (oh how I missed writing his POV)

That Time Techno Gets a Solo Mission

Chapter Summary

It's been a month.
Fucking L

or. techno faces his problems, then he doesn't. then he faces A NEW PROBLEM, then he doesn't face that one and has hot chocolate and then he does face more pressing problems because he does not cope v well and then he's stressed that this problem will be shoved onto tommy (it probably will) so he does not have a good time about that.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: hospitals, medical talk, talks of drugs (blue), talks of chronic pain
Panic attack, voices and mentions of throwing up from the lines:

“Techno’s heart seizes in his throat, he can’t breathe— he can’t—” Until “You need to go home,” is what TapL says, “Being here is not helping you at all.”

[Edit]: Due to certain events this chapter has been heavily edited and the original intentions and themes were changed. If things sound clunky that will be why.

Anything that was previously canon in this chapter and that has been deleted is no longer canon and has been retconned.

Disclaimer: I almost failed biology, all of my science I’ve made up with blue and hybrid genetics is... made up. Okay, none of this is fact. I am makin’ words go on a document and hoping they KINDA make sense.

Also the Wilbur with the Logsted accent thing is inspired by [this tiktok](#)
by Solis_Eclipse (follow them they’re super cool)

[PISTOL](#) FUCKING *CARRIED* [THE REDDING STREET LORE](#), AND I AM SO THANK YOU. THANK YOU PISTOL, EVERYONE SAY THANK YOU PISTOL FOR MAKING SUCH A FLESHED OUT AND REALISTIC PLACE WHICH I THEN GOT TO WRITE IN

[Rae](#), [Humanoid](#), [Twilight](#). Thank you to all of these fucks /aff for making me sick with the tinaaos hybrid lore... several times. My version is the toned down version. It was rough. BUT THANK YOU I COULD NOT HAVE DONE THIS WITHOUT YOU <33

Thank you to Apollo, Rae (again), Sky and Sarixx for helping me with the names of all the branches of Elysium, and their respective leaders' names. ALSO APOLLO FUCK YOU FOR MAKING ME HAVE LIKE FIVE MORE BRANCHES THAN I NEEDED. This was also [my reference picture for the bakery](#), soooo any artists or anyone just curious. Have this. Also THE BIGGEST SHOUT OUT TO JORJA IN THE WORLD, for helping me so much with the actual scenes where Redding is described. <333

ALSO SHOUT OUT TO JORJA IN GENERAL FOR HELPING ME. Also helping me with how bakeries work (AND SKY TOO, THANK YOU MY BELOVEDS). THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU TO TWI WHO WROTE THE HYBRID DESCRIPTION BECAUSE IT WAS MAKING ME FEEL ILL. THANK YOU FIG FOR BETA-READING LIKE A BOSS, AND GENERALLY BEING A COOL PERSON

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Techno's never liked hospitals.

Apparently he'd cry whenever a doctor held him, which is something he's still pretty close to doing.

He doesn't like hospitals, the cleanliness of them, the doctors with judging eyes, people with judging eyes. Sitting next to the bed of someone who is still and almost perfectly so. There are nurses walking around and Techno is nervous.

He knows he has to call Purpled and probably Wilbur and Phil, they'd also want to know. But he can't.

All he can do is sit in his almost calm sort of panic and wonder what the fuck went wrong back there? There's nurses and doctors walking around, too close to him so it feels like someone is breathing down his neck. He knows that no one is doing anything like that because no one truthfully gives a shit about that.

But still, every time someone walks past him he feels a little bout of panic inside his chest which he has to ignore and pray to anything out there that it will go away.

It's yet to go away.

"Technoblade?" Someone says and Techno looks up from his hands.

In front of him is a doctor, shockingly enough. He has a red, black and yellow patterned mask on the lower half of his face. He also looks a little bit exhausted, and Techno swears that he has a prosthetic arm, but he's not going to assume because that's rude.

"Yeah?" Techno manages, his throat is dry, it would be nice if he could have a glass of water. But no, because Techno doesn't get shit in L'Manberg, no one gets jackshit in L'Manberg. It's a bit of a scam, but that's alright.

Techno glances back at Tommy in the bed, he looks peaceful.

That's fucking new for him.

"So, this is your—"

"Brother?" Techno says, "Kinda— not really."

"Alright," he says, "I'm Ponk, I'll be looking after Tommy. We're thinking of running a couple of tests, blood sugar, maybe a MRI, it really depends on when he wakes up. Being knocked out for two hours normally means something is wrong."

“No blood tests,” Techno says.

He remembers Tommy shaking yesterday when the very concept of a blood test was brought up, and what kind of brother would Techno be if he forgot that?

“He doesn’t— like blood tests.”

“That’s alright,” Ponk says, and he must be used to this behaviour because he continues smoothly as if Techno didn’t say anything. “So does he have any family that we need to get in contact with?”

“Yeah. Uh— roommates.”

Ponk glances at the clipboard he’s holding, he flips up a page before nodding. “Yup. We have Tubbo Underscore as an emergency contact. That seems alright to me, unless you think there’s an issue?”

Techno shakes his head.

“No, Thomas isn’t on record here with powers.”

“Correct,” Techno says because it is.

Ponk sighs, before sitting down on the end of the bed, almost careful in case he’s somehow disturbing Tommy in some way and inconveniencing him. “I’m not asking you to tell me anything, but doctors have a strict patient confidentiality agreement. Some kids slip through the tests and records. But I need to know if you think this is a power related thing, or something else.”

Techno bounces his leg a bit faster, before biting at his nails. He knows that annoys the *fuck* out of Wilbur, but Wilbur isn't here at the minute. He's working, if Techno remembers the timetable right.

"I..." Techno takes a deep breath. "Why does it matter?"

"Because if it's a power related thing, then it's probably overexertion. If it's not then there's a serious medical issue that I need to address as quickly as I can."

Techno bounces his leg faster, somehow.

He should really stop biting his nails.

"Don't lose sleep over it," Techno mutters.

Ponk nods, "Okay. Anyone who I can't tell?"

"Phil and Wil— uh, Philza and Spectre, they dunno and I think the kid would like to keep it that way."

"Ah," Ponk says, "Can do. Will they be here?"

"Probably," Techno mutters, "I should probably tell Wilbur..."

He grabs his phone before it rings a few times.

Wilbur should be on patrol, which hopefully means that he's not going to drop everything and freak the fuck out. But also knowing Wilbur he'll probably do that, because the fucker is protective over Tommy.

If Wilbur finds out Tommy is Theseus, it will *not* be pretty.

But right now Wilbur would rip the world apart for that kid, and there's something almost sweet about the way Wilbur's so willing to throw everything away for Tommy. Techno laughs and picks up the phone.

It rings twice.

"I'm on patrol you fuck—"

"Tommy's hurt."

"I am no longer on patrol," Wilbur states. *"I'll be there in five."*

"How?"

Wilbur hangs up.

Techno sighs.

He takes a deep breath before calling Purpled. Not Tubbo, he's not sure why, he has both of their numbers. He'd just... rather message Purpled than Tubbo, it might have *a little* to do with the fact that Techno is fucking terrified of Tubbo and pretty chill with Purpled.

He rings and holds the phone up to his ear. "Purpled."

"What the fuck do you want— it's like... one in the morning."

“Tommy’s in hospital.”

A moment of silence. *“Ha what a fuckin’ idiot.”*

“Purpled.”

“Oh fuck, that’s my fuckin’ idiot,” Purpled groans and it sounds like he rolls around for a bit before standing up. *“Who the fuck let him— what the fuck happened?”*

“Uh. He almost killed someone.”

“Cool,” Purpled says tiredly. *“Where the fuck is the bail money?”*

“You have bail money?”

“Yeah,” Purpled deadpans, *“I’m friends with Tommy and Tubbo, of course I have bail money. Where’s the envelope?”* There’s shuffling on the other end. *“Wait, is he in jail?”*

“No.”

“He’s not going to be under arrest?”

“I— don’t think so?”

“You sound unsure,” Purpled deadpans.

“I *am* unsure.”

Purpled sighs, “*Okay. I’ll bring the bail money in case.*” There’s more shuffling and knocking on a door. “*Tubbo. Ranboo.*” It’s slightly muffled but Techno can still hear it pretty clearly. “*Tommy’s in hospital.*”

“*What?*” Someone says, and Techno thinks that’s Ranboo. He’s never met the kid, but it’s not Tubbo, so that only leaves Ranboo. “*What do you mean he’s in hospital?*”

“*He’s in the hospital,*” Purpled deadpans, “*Wake up Tubbo, we’re going.*” There’s some more shuffling and moving about, and Purpled sighs holding the phone back to his ear. “*Yeah, we’ll be there in a moment.*”

Techno nods, before slumping down in his chair slightly. The phone clicks off and Techno stares out across the room for a moment.

Phil. He still has to call Phil.

He picks up his phone and finds Phil’s contact. It’s not like he has a heap of contacts to keep track of. He has like... Wilbur, Tommy, Niki, Phil, Dream and then Tubbo and Purpled saved. He still hasn’t saved Puffy’s number, he might need to get onto that sooner rather than later.

It rings a couple of times.

“*Wha—*” Phil says, ever the man to wake up at annoying times. “*Is this another kidnapping situation, Tech? If you got kidnapped again I’m going to be so mad.*”

“Tommy’s in hospital—” Techno blurts out, he doesn’t even manage to build up his answer to be more than that, or respond to the banter. He’s always found it difficult to keep himself from just spilling everything when it comes to Phil. “And— I dunno what to do Phil because it wasn’t good and now he’s going to get in trouble and I don’t know what to do—”

“Okay, okay,” Phil says, sounding about a million times more awake. “I will be there as soon as possible. He’s in the Logstedchire hospital, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay,” Phil says gently and Techno lets himself relax a little. “Everything’s okay, Tommy’s okay. You’re alright.”

Techno nods, even though Phil can’t see it.

“I’ll be there in a moment.”

Then he hangs up.

Techno pauses.

Okay. He’s... contacted everyone worth contacting. He takes a deep breath before putting his head in his hands and looking down at the floor. It’s a boring as fuck floor. Somewhere there’s a distant heart monitor, and people chattering in the next room down. Which is always polite.

He’s shaking.

He doesn’t know what the fuck he’s supposed to do with this. What do you even do if the vigilante who you’re training to try to be better than you, does something you would when you were fourteen?

How is he supposed to look at Tommy and not see himself, but better?

He needs to get this kid some sort of training, obviously, from someone who can maybe do jackshit about it. Techno doesn't have the same power sets as this kid, not even close... fucking no one has this broad of a power set.

Techno taps his foot against the ground.

He needs a plan.

He knows he needs a plan. It's not like he can go to Phil and ask about this, Phil is— being Phil. Maybe Wilbur? But even then Wilbur knows about three people. Maybe Schlatt knows someone?

He runs his hands through his hair, brushing it out of his face.

What the fuck *is* he supposed to do? Apart from freak the fuck out?

Bad would know what to do.

Wait. Bad *would* know what to do.

Techno sits up a little bit more.

Bad is in Redding—

That was a couple years ago, but it's better than nothing. Right? If he can find Redding, then maybe he can try to find Bad again.

Problem: he might get stabbed at Redding.

Another problem, they might have moved the entrance. And the fact that Elysium has some sort of involvement with Redding Street now, considering what the kids found. All Techno currently has to go off of is a USB that Sam and him combined are struggling to crack. It has little information on Bad, but it's *something*.

Oh yeah. The USB... he stole from Tommy.

That's— gonna be awkward to explain.

Okay. Techno needs to try and get the bit of information he needs to figure out if that Bad is his Bad, and then maybe— hopefully— he can find someone who can train Tommy out of whatever this is.

Then Wilbur runs in through the door.

He stops and looks at Tommy.

It's scary seeing Tommy this pale and still. He's always so full of life and just... moving and living that it's more than unnerving to see him like this. And— Wilbur is seeing that for the first time.

His mouth falls open and he looks at Techno. "He looks like shit."

Techno nods.

"What— happened?"

Techno takes a deep breath. “Uh.”

Wilbur looks away from Tommy and his eyes bore into Techno. “Techno.”

“Can we wait for Phil?” Techno says. “I don’t wanna explain it twice.”

That’s a lie.

He doesn’t want to explain it once.

He needs *an* explanation. He doesn’t reckon saying: *‘So our employee recognised the ring-leader of a fighting ring I was in and made my life awful. And recognised him because he’s that vigilante you hate and he was at the warehouse.’* For some reason he has the sneaking suspicion that won’t go well.

Oh yeah and the *‘said employee who is a vigilante beat the shit outta that guy and now said guy is in hospital and waiting to be questioned. Oh yeah, also at the end of that said vigilantes powers glitched out and then he passed out so we have no idea what’s happening with his powers.’* Yeah... that’ll go down smoothly.

Okay.

He can handle the police, he’ll just lie and say they went to attack Tommy and then Techno intervened but overestimated his strength. They’re not gonna ask too many questions about it, they probably won’t care.

The real issue is Philza Minecraft and Wilbur Soot.

Such is his life, he supposes.

Maybe... he'll go with the same story. Phil and Wil won't question it in public. He also needs to somehow let Tommy know about this plan.

"Are you okay?" Wilbur asks.

"Huh?"

"You seem stressed."

"I am stressed."

Wilbur sighs, dragging a chair up next to Techno and sitting down. "It'll be alright," Wilbur says. "Phil got you out of attempted murder once, he can do it again."

"Yeah... last time ended up with me here though. Next time lands me in Pandora."

Wilbur hums. "Nah we'd run away."

"You would?"

Wilbur screws up his face, "For you? Obviously."

Techno smiles. "Huh."

"You didn't think I would?" Wilbur says. "Because obviously I'd run away with you if things ever went terribly wrong."

Techno hums. "Thanks."

"Would you get outta L'Manberg if Tommy was in trouble?" Wilbur asks.

Techno looks over at Tommy, opening his mouth and then closing it. Tommy looks peaceful, slightly injured, but peaceful.

And yeah. If Tommy was found out as Theseus and unsafe, Techno would get Tommy out of the country. No hesitation.

"Yeah." Techno says. "I dunno what he'd have to do—" a lie. "But— he'd be outta there and quickly."

Wilbur nods.

They both sit there silently for a moment.

Techno really needs a story.

Phil walks in, looking surprisingly composed. Techno however knows that internally he's just screaming. Which— same, except Techno's not great at suppressing that yet. He's getting there, not quite Wilbur level.

(Yet.)

One day he'll be there, just... not today for sure.

The first thing Phil does is look at Tommy and his face drops a little bit, Techno almost misses it, but there's something there. Phil looks over at Techno.

Ah. Okay.

“What happened?”

Techno opens his mouth and closes it again. Okay. He needs a solid story to give both Phil and Wilbur and the police, Phil and Wilbur might call bullshit but Techno can deal with that later.

“Uh—” Techno hesitates. Hopefully they don’t call him out that quickly, because that might be the last thing he wants in the entire world.

Wilbur already knows whatever he’s about to say next is a lie. Phil probably does too. He’s never been a great liar and that most likely isn’t going to start any time soon. Damn— why do they have to know him so well? He’s not like Tommy who can lie through his teeth about anything and everything.

How can he avoid this as long as possible?

He used to give himself nosebleeds whenever people asked him about anything mildly annoying. And... here probably counts. Okay, time to call upon his sketchy as fuck powers which may or may not work anymore.

And it doesn’t work.

Cool!

“Did you just try to—”

“Shut up, Wilbur.”

“You did the nosebleed trick?” Wilbur shrieks, he folds over laughing and sinks further down in his seat, to the point where he’s almost on the floor.

Phil looks at Wilbur who is one step away from pissing himself laughing and then back at Techno. “The what?”

Wilbur wheezes a bit harder. “When— he wanted to avoid a conversation—” he cuts himself off and laughs a bit harder. “Nosebleed,” he manages between his constant laughter. “He’d give himself a nosebleed.”

Phil’s eyes go wide. “You did not.”

“I did.” Techno mutters.

“You had so many nosebleeds?”

“Yeah...” Techno says slowly. “You gotta love healing powers that have been horribly exploited, it’s a fun time for me. So I’d just... y’know start using my powers. No one else was a fan of that, but it worked pretty well for me.”

Phil sighs. “Okay, what really happened to Tommy?”

Is there a coffee table he can smash here? Because he can and will do that, to prove his point. Is it ethically or morally correct? Probably not, but it would be funny either way.

Any cups he can break and then blame on piglin instincts?

No.

Damn... he's really outta options.

Wait, no. There's one last option.

"I plead the fifth."

Phil just looks at him. "We're not in America mate—"

Techno glares. "Well I am invoking my right to remain silent."

"Shit," Wilbur mutters, "He's good."

"He's—" Phil sighs, somehow sounding more and more tired with every passing second. "I will bring in Quackity."

Techno remains silent.

"Shit, he's really good." Wilbur mutters, "Who let Techno learn laws, or his rights as a citizen?"

Techno glares at him, but remains silent.

"Techno."

Techno just looks at Wilbur.

“I’m invoking my right to remain silent, I want to speak to a lawyer before I incriminate myself in any way shape or form.” Techno crosses his arms, and Phil looks like he’s about to kick himself off a roof. “So... get fucked.”

Phil and Wilbur exchange a glance.

Wilbur stands up and starts pacing in front of Techno.

Oh they’re good cop, bad cop-ing. Both their interrogation method and how they try to get information out of Techno.

“Mate, we just wanna know so we know how to handle this.”

“You liar!” Wilbur yells, ah, bad cop. Apart from the fact that he’s really bad at it. Like... painfully bad at it. Techno has been interrogated for real and it was not this funny. “Tell us or... I dunno.”

Phil looks *somehow* even more tired.

“Phil, how do I be bad cop? You can’t be bad cop, that would just make him sad.”

“That is true.” Techno says, “I would start sobbing.”

“Why... why did I adopt you.”

“Not adopted,” Techno says with a huge grin.

Wilbur groans, “Techno, tell us what happened and I’ll give you fifty dollars.”

“A hundred.”

“Sure!”

Sometimes Techno worries if the fact bribes sway him so easily is an issue... it might be, but he can just call it a trauma response from not having enough money when he was young.

And then, boom, he’s suddenly not the bad guy. Which is fun!

“Guy tried to mug us. Started attackin’ Tommy and then I stepped in, and forgot my strength.”

Phil and Wilbur exchange a glance.

Okay, they caught onto that lie way too quickly. Techno thought he’d at least have a moment or two to get his thoughts together. But nooooo.

“We’ll talk about it later,” Phil says, looking back at Tommy. “I suppose Tommy might have something to say about this?”

“Maybe.” Techno says, tapping his foot against the ground.

Wilbur sighs, “Tech—”

“Don’t.” Techno says, “Just— don’t.”

Wilbur hesitates before crossing his arms and sinking down in his seat. “I don’t like you very much.”

“Yeah you do.”

“Yeah... I do.” Wilbur sighs. “You know what, I wish you were in Pandora’s.”

“That just is not true.”

“No, no, it is.”

“It’s just not.”

“No, it is. You’re my least favourite person.” Wilbur scowls. “I hope that you shoot another president.”

“Have you seen the current guy? It’s more than likely.”

Phil sighs. “Please don’t joke about shooting a president.”

Techno looks at Phil with a deadpan expression. “It’s not a joke.”

Phil facepalms, “At least don’t get caught this time.”

Techno looks back at Tommy, who’s sleeping and blissfully unaware of all the effort that Techno just went through to save his skin. The things he does for this kid.

Techno grabs his phone before deciding to text Purpled.

Technoblode:

The cover story is that someone mugged us, attacked Tommy, I stepped in. I won't be there when he wakes up. So tell him

Danuel GrEEEyson:

k boomer

there in a sec

Turns out, Purpled meant that fucking literally because he's in the door the next second. With a tired looking child behind him who Techno does not recognise.

Maybe he's from when Tommy got his ribs busted, but Techno can barely remember that on a good day, let alone today.

Techno looks at him.

He's... fucking tall, that's for sure. Like taller than Wilbur and that's pretty difficult to do, he has some sort of Ender hybrid situation going on, considering the height and the half-and-half look he has going on.

He also looks fucking terrified.

Welp, what's one more unstable child figure?

Between Tommy and Purpled, he can probably adopt this one too.

“Hi,” Techno says, shocking himself at the fact he speaks. That's unlike him. Look at him go, he's becoming an extrovert— okay he wouldn't quite go that far.

“Hello.” The kid mutters. “I’m Ranboo.”

Ah. This is Ranboo, nice.

“Techno,” Techno says, apparently taking a leaf out of Wilbur’s book and being all polite and shit. “Guessing that idiot is yours?”

Ranboo sighs, sounding a bit too tired for how old he actually is.

“Yup,” he says, sounding actually more than tired.”That’s... Tommy.”

Techno nudges him in the side, “Hey, he’s gonna be alright.”

Ranboo hesitates for a second, before nodding his head a couple times. “Yeah. It’s Tommy.”

Techno has some... mixed reactions about that, the tone of voice and other things pop some red flags up. Okay, that’s something that needs to be addressed later.

“Are you alright?” Ranboo asks and Techno blinks at him. “Looks like you’re falling asleep standing up.”

“Tired,” Techno mutters, “That’s all, I’m good.”

Phil shoots him a worried look and Techno, like a lad, ignores him.

Ranboo glances at Techno and then glances away, he’s not quite sure why, but he does anyway. “I— do you know what’s wrong?”

He looks at Wilbur and Phil, and Ranboo seems to get that message because he nods his head and looks back out at Tommy.

The door opens again, it's a police officer.

Wilbur and Phil look at each other and then look at Techno.

"Hi, could we have a word with you?" They say.

"No." Techno says easily, with a smile. "You can not. Goodbye—"

"Techno—"

"That is fully within my rights, unless I'm being detained, in that case I don't need to speak either. Unless they read me my Miranda Rights—"

"This isn't America."

"Don't care, still have the right to remain silent," Techno looks back at the police officer and gives perhaps the fakest smile he has ever given anyone, or will ever give anyone. "So no, no thank you."

The police officer blunders for a moment, before nodding and walking away.

Purpled just stares at him. "What the fuck? That makes you look so suspicious."

"Not enough to hold up in a court of law," Techno mutters, he crosses his arms. "If they want to detain me for questioning, then I'm just not gonna say anything. I want my lawyer, and they can only hold me for so many hours."

“Hero committee can hold you for as long as they seem fit,” Ranboo adds.

Techno gives him a look. “I was questioned by the hero committee for two days when I got caught.”

That for *some* reason seems to drag down the mood in the room. Techno resists the urge to roll his eyes and instead he looks at Ranboo. “Pro-tip, don’t piss off heroes. Police are fine —”

“Don’t tell kids to piss of police—”

“Fuck yeah!” Purpled says, “I’m gonna piss off so many police.”

Phil sighs.

He looks at Purpled and then at Ranboo. Wait— where’s the other one? Tubbo, y’know the one who is legally Tommy’s emergency contact and should probably be here, in Techno’s humble opinion.

“Where’s— Tubbo?” Techno says, “I’m pretty sure the hospital called him.”

Ranboo shifts on his feet. “Uh— didn’t wanna be here.”

“Huh?” Purpled says, “You said it was because—” he cuts himself off and Techno has no clue what to make of that. “He’s here because he doesn’t wanna be? I get that him and Tommy are like arguing but—”

“Leave it, Daniel,” Ranboo murmurs, looking right at Techno.

“What? No, I won’t fucking leave it, what sort of best friend—”

“I said, leave it,” Ranboo basically snarls.

It’s the most aggression that Techno’s seen out of this kid in the few times they’ve met and judging by Purpled’s face it’s also the most aggressive he’s heard Ranboo.

Right, okay, don’t get on Ranboo’s bad side.

Purpled rolls his eyes and crosses his arms, he opens his mouth to say something.

Ranboo shoots him a withering glare and Purpled closes his mouth.

“Tubbo should—”

“I am going to brutally murder you,” Ranboo claps his hands together.

“Right, okay,” Phil says, “What if no murder takes place, that would be rather nice.”

Ranboo glares a bit more at Purpled, before apparently relenting because he sits down in one of the seats— where Techno was going to sit, but Techno sure as fuck is not going to say anything now.

“So…” Wilbur says. “Now what?”

Techno opens his mouth and then closes it, “I actually gotta go do something.”

Wilbur gives him a look. “You never have anything to do. If you had a phone call, you’d watch it ring.”

“It’s not a phone call,” Techno walks towards the door slowly. “Uh... make sure Tommy’s alright? I’ll hopefully be back before midday? Don’t quote me on that, okay bye!”

He basically runs out of the room because he’s a coward who doesn’t want to have to answer any questions. Wilbur yells something after him, but Techno’s basically already at the stairs.

He runs down them and walks out of the hospital.

Okay, first thing he doesn’t want is to be recognised.

So he puts his hood up. Not the best disguise but at least it’s something, if not much, it’s at least hiding his hair from the world.

His hair is getting longer. It’s nice.

Maybe he should get Niki to actually fix it, make it look nice instead of the raggedy mess it currently is. Also... he hasn’t had to dye his hair since the warehouse, which is surprisingly a nice perk.

It does mean there are two different shades of pink, but it looks pretty cool that way.

Okay.

He needs a laptop.

He walks home. It's a fairly short walk, and with his hood up no one recognises him. If they do, he's just gonna say he's a cosplayer. It tends to work.

Opening the door to his apartment, he flops onto the couch.

Floof is... at Niki's? Hopefully, otherwise Floof is in an unspecified location at one in the morning. Oh no, it's two now.

He peels himself off the couch and stumbles towards the laptop, where the USB is still plugged in. He did feel slightly bad about stealing this from Tommy, but now it's his and there's little that either can do about it.

The USB is weird, because there's a lot of information about some kid from a fighting ring, Techno tried to get through whatever encryption that was on it, but didn't have a lot of success. So Sam tried, and he got through it a bit easier.

Then they got to looking for information on Bad and Redding Street.

Including the current entrance.

He reaches towards his phone and calls Sam.

It rings once.

"Hello?"

"Sam."

"Why are you awake?" Sam asks.

“Why are *you* awake?”

“It’s only two, that’s fine. Still at the workshop. Are you alright?”

“Yeah...” Techno says, and both of them know it’s a lie. “Basically... I kinda— need to find Redding Street.”

Sam makes a noise, clearly disagreeing. *“Techno— that’s a terrible idea.”*

“I know, I know,” Techno starts pacing around. “Look. I know it’s at one of three entrances, I need access to camera footage from each of those places. I can figure it out, I just need any security camera footage.”

Sam sighs. *“Where do you think the entrances are?”*

“One behind the fish factory... like the local one, what’s its name. The one that did the catering for that event.”

“Yeah I know it.”

“One’s like... a manhole cover between Friend and Wellington Street. It’s the one like on the corner?”

“Mhmm—” there’s some keyboard noises and clicking from the other side.

“And the last one is a compartment in a tree at Logstedchire Park. The huge willow near the pond? That sometimes is opened and can get you into the sewers.”

“... you’re gonna go through the sewers?”

“If that’s the only option, then yeah.”

There’s a moment of *very* judgemental silence.

“Right, okay. Footage has been sent to you... try to get a nap sometime.”

Techno will not.

“Cool, thank you Sam, bye—”

“Are you not gonna be in for work today?”

Techno pauses, normally Sam of all people does not give a flying fuck if someone’s at work or not. “Probably not.”

“Okay...” Sam says, “I think Dream wanted to talk to you, about the whole Theseus thing. He’s not coping as well as he thinks he is.”

“Right okay. I’ll try to catch up with him.”

“Cool, bye,” and Sam hangs up.

Right. So currently things Techno has to manage include: not letting Tommy get caught, figuring out what the fuck Tommy did to that man, how to avoid the police, finding Redding Street and surviving there, and Dream being one step away from an emotional breakdown.

Cool.

Techno sighs and opens his email. Only the manhole and park have footage, it appears the fish factory doesn't.

Okay. He's gonna need a hot chocolate for this.

He gets his hot chocolate, puts a blanket over his shoulders and starts watching the footage.

Of course he speeds it up, because he's not a weirdo. It's three days worth of footage, he's sure as fuck not taking six days to sift through the footage.

He finds nothing at the park.

And then nothing at the manhole cover.

Huh.

So it's at the fish factory then?

Reluctantly he stands up, grabbing a coat this time, on top of his hoodie and shrugging it on.

He locks the apartment door and leaves.

He kinda misses when he could pass this boring work off to other people, Minx would love this. But no— since he's not allowed to go on patrol that leaves him and him alone to do all this undercover work.

It's quiet, this early in the morning. And Techno doesn't have much to do apart from being alone with his thoughts, it's a bit lonely.

The streets are quiet, with flickering street lamps that should've gone out years ago but are clinging on out of nothing but spite. There's a few cars in the distance, and a party nearby that he can tell by all of the yelling. Since it's early on a Saturday morning, then it's like... probably fine.

He puts his head down and keeps on walking.

Honestly, he has no plans on getting mugged today, he doesn't even have anything on him. He probably should've had some ID, that way he can prove— wait does he even have ID?

“Hey?”

“Hey, I’m Squid—”

Techno jumps and turns around.

“You alright?” They ask, “You look a bit lost in your own head.”

Techno does not know this person. “Huh?”

“You alright?” They repeat slowly.

“I— yeah.”

“Okay...” they say but don't sound convinced.

“Hey, hey, hey— you’re alright. You’re okay.”

What the fuck is happening?

Techno turns around and walks a bit faster. He does not need to get trapped in his own head, that’s just not something he needs to do today. Or any day, at that, he’s perfectly fine. With... not dealing with this.

Eventually he gets to the factory, he’s been to this entrance before.

The factory is a huge slab of concrete that rises out of the ground without much fanfare. It doesn’t stand in with the residence around it, and it has a scrappily painted picture of a fish on the front of it and some pathetic bushes to almost make it look welcoming.

It really doesn’t work.

Lingering in the air is the slightly rotten smell of fish, not because the fish are rotting, but because fish just smells bad in general. Techno can taste it in his mouth and he’s honestly not the biggest fan of it.

Surrounding the back of the factory is a wooden fence, Techno doesn’t need to see it to know it’s there. Here was the hiding spot of many run ins with heroes and police way back when.

Over the fence is a couple of crates, some of them have been there for years. But there’s some sorta deal going on that means the factory will ignore it and they get a couple extra dollars in their pockets.

He approaches the back of the fence, before peering over it. Sure enough, the same crates from all those years ago are there. The one in the middle of the stack hasn’t even moved slightly

He hops over the fence, landing near the crates.

In the corner of the alley behind the factory, is a set of crates.

He walks up to the crates before banging his hand against it.

A panel pops out, with a keypad on it.

Oh fuck. Techno did not have this last time he was here.

Techno glares at the keypad, before looking up at the camera he knows is watching him. He doesn't take off the hood of his hoodie and instead knocks on the crate. "Uh... if Bad is still here, which he should be, he knows me. That's the vouch system right? Do you even still have that?"

No response.

Fucking helpful!

He knocks on the crate. He could brute force this thing open, but that's probably not the best approach if there are about... thirty hybrids behind this fake crate that could probably kill him, and easily.

Techno looks up at the camera again. "Do you still have the grave for Squid?"

A moment of hesitation, before the front of the crate falls down. There's a path that leads underground, upgraded since Techno was last here. There are little lights either side leading downwards.

Sure enough, Bad is standing there. He looks slightly worse than five years ago, with the flakiness. Wither skeleton hybrid— ammiright?

He has a hoodie, which covers most of his head, so Techno can only see white eyes and the black skin... which might not actually be skin, if Techno thinks about it. It might just straight up be bone, which is slightly terrifying.

“Hi.” Techno says.

Bad stares at him. Before taking a deep breath, he claps his hands together before looking at Techno. “What the muffin?”

Techno gives a small awkward wave. “Hi... it’s... been a while.”

“Yeah...” Bad says, “It’s been a while.”

“No way is that Techno— dude,” someone pushes through a door at the end of the tunnel.

It’s TapL.

Oh. Okay.

“What the fuck—”

“What are you doing?” TapL says, and oh he has a throwing axe which he’s currently pointing at Techno. Like he’s about to throw it. “How did you even—”

“The front door,” Techno deadpans, “That’s how most people tend to get in. This is not a new concept—”

TapL throws the axe and it lands on the ground just at Techno’s feet. It skids along the concrete and lands next to his foot. Techno picks it up and flips it over in his hand.

It’s the same one from when they were kids, it has about a thousand nicks in it, and a bandage wrapped around the handle that is falling apart. Considering TapL has never been overly sentimental this obviously means something.

And oh, now he just has two guns pointing at him. Cool.

Really levelling it up with the class here. TapL holds them the way that most people hold a pen or pencil. Which... geez okay.

Bad sighs, before pointing TapL’s guns at the ground for him. “What have I said about guns in hallways?”

“Not to wave them around like flags.”

“And what are you doing?”

“Waving them around like flags,” TapL groans. He puts the gun back into the holsters on his legs, before looking at Techno. “Why are you here again?”

“I was just going to ask you to escort him out,” Bad says with a smile.

TapL steps forwards grinning a bit too much.

“Wait, wait, wait—”

TapL does not wait and grabs onto Techno's shoulder, before starting to drag him out.

"Rule of Mercy!" Techno yells, and TapL's grip loosens. "Rule of Mercy— I'm enacting Rule of Mercy, you can't kick me out—"

"You have to be a blue hybrid for Rule of Mercy to apply," TapL says, grabbing his shoulder again.

"How the fuck am I supposed to prove it?" Techno yells, he fights off TapL and looks at Bad. "However you prove it, I can. I am— I don't know how to prove it, but I can."

Bad crosses his arms before looking at TapL, then back at Techno. "Why are you here?"

"Because," Techno says, shaking off TapL's arm again. "Because there's a kid who can't control his powers and I don't know who else to go to. Because I'm terrified about what the fuck blue can do to me, and I don't know where else I can go."

"You're not going to believe him," TapL says.

Bad stays quiet.

"You're believing him?" TapL groans, "He's clearly snooping around for the heroes."

"Show me your teeth," Bad says. "TapL let go of him."

TapL stops trying to get a grip on Techno's shoulder.

Techno opens his mouth showing off his teeth which really like to cut up the sides of his cheeks. Bad hums and takes a step back.

“What type?”

“Piglin.”

Bad glances at his hair.

“Oh come on,” TapL groans. “He’s clearly not—”

Bad shoots him a look. “TapL, out of the two of us, who is the one who is actually a blue hybrid?”

“You.”

“Which one was one of the first test subjects?”

“Also you.”

“Which one devoted their life to learning about blue?”

“You,” TapL groans like he’s a teenager told he can’t go to a party.

“When?” Bad asks.

“Uh— do you know when the news story went around about me passing out in an alley?”

“Ha yeah,” TapL laughs, “The photo was really funny, your mouth was all half open—”

“About thirty minutes? Maybe an hour before.”

TapL pauses, for a moment he almost looks regretful or guilty.

He recovers quickly though, “Surprised your PR guy managed to spin that, back when you first joined, that would’ve got you thrown into Pandora’s.”

“I’ll fucking throw you into Pandora’s—” Techno goes to swipe at TapL, and TapL has a knife at his throat a moment later.

Techno’s back hits against the side of the wall, and TapL looks fully ready to slice his throat open right then and there.

“Listen here,” TapL snaps. “I’m not as weak as I used to be, I’m not the easy pickings in a fight and I’m sure not going to let myself be intimidated by some *hero* who ran as soon as things got difficult.”

“Geez okay, you can stop trying to stab me now.”

“No, I don’t think you get it,” TapL says, moving the knife a little bit closer to his neck. “We looked up to you, then you killed Squid and then you ran. The next day, you ran and got adopted by a hero and never came back for us.”

“TapL—”

“Don’t.” TapL says, “Okay? Nothing you can possibly say will make it better, so shut up and let me talk.”

Techno shuts up.

“You’re not ruining what we’re building here—”

“Wait what are you building here—”

“I said don’t talk.” TapL says. “So you’re here because someone got you, don’t give a shit about that. What I *do* give a shit about is being here like nothing happened.”

TapL eventually decides he’s over whatever character arc he’s having and lets go of Techno, before turning around and walking away.

Techno looks at Bad, “You could’ve stopped that.”

Bad gives a half smile. “I think he needed it.”

Techno doesn’t disagree, so he crosses his arms.

Bad gives a welcoming smile, before turning around and walking down the small ramp and Techno follows after him. “So what brings you here? I’m guessing that you’re not in any kind of trouble, I would’ve probably heard about it.”

“I’m not,” Techno confirms slowly.

Bad nods at a guard who was a fucking giant guard, and the door at the end of the tunnel is opened for them. Light peaks through and Techno finds himself squinting at the light coming through the door.

“So... why are you here?”

He’s led into another tunnel, this one looks like a sewer that’s been... desewerified.

It’s a circular tunnel that leads to what looks like some sort of bank door, that has two guards in front of it. If Techno squints he’s pretty sure he can see some gnarly looking guns that he does not want to get on the bad end of.

There’s also several guards standing at various points down the tunnel, illuminated by the slightly flickering and broken lights that hang from the top of the old sewer. They all have awfully terrifying guns, and Techno *does not* want to think about how they got those.

However the bottom has been kinda... filled with concrete, so it’s a flat surface, which eventually curves up into the circle. Kinda like an arch the entire way across the tunnel.

There are lights on either side, and the bottom has been flattened out so it’s easier to walk through. The light is low, but not impossibly so, Techno can still see what he’s doing with ease.

Still, the tunnel feels like someone’s gonna jump out at you.

They pass another guard, and Bad gives them a nod, and he gets one back.

“Wasn’t trying to get pity before,” Techno says, “I need to know more about blue and I need to find someone to train the kid.”

Bad looks contemplative for a moment before glancing at Techno. “Theseus?”

“Theseus.”

Bad hums.

They pass yet another guard, “How is TapL doing?” Bad asks this specific guard.

“Well... he’s not doing amazingly,” The guard manages to say, he looks at Techno, eyes narrowing. “Are you sure we should be letting in— him?”

Bad puts a hand on Techno’s shoulder, it’s more welcoming than Techno was expecting. “He is my guest, and I expect him to be treated with kindness. Alright?” Bad says, his voice is nothing but smiles but all three of them know that he’s not exactly someone you should cross and the underlying threat is there.

“Really?” The guard says.

Bad smiles a bit wider, “I appreciate your concern, but he is from Logstedchire too. If anyone in that tower understands it’ll be him.”

He is aware, that he’s missing out on a huge amount of context, and now he wants to know *what* exactly they’re keeping here that has everyone so worried. Is it like... a drug ring, because then Techno might actually have to deal with it.

Techno looks at the guard.

Bad puts his hand back on Techno’s shoulder and starts to walk towards the end of the tunnel where there looks to be a vault door.

The guard has a purple flower badge on his lapel.

Techno stares at it for a moment too long, before he goes to move towards the guard.

“You’re in—”

Bad’s grip tightens and he essentially starts dragging Techno down to the middle of the tunnel.

He stops there, and turns to look at Techno. He doesn’t look *angry* as such, he just looks very pissed off. “Did ya really have to notice that now?”

“He’s in—”

“Yes, yes,” Bad mutters, looking at the guards stationed by the door and the one they just passed. “Most people here are, okay?” He looks back over his shoulder and sighs. “I need you not to get weird about this—”

“They tried to kill my brother! They almost killed—”

Bad slaps a hand across Techno’s mouth and glares at him. With enough force that Techno shuts up.

Kinda feels like the old ring days, where Techno would try to run his mouth and Bad would try to shut them the fuck up. It never really went well, for either of them. Now they’re both older, Bad isn’t a teenager and Techno isn’t a kid anymore.

Bad glares, and removes his hand.

Techno stays quiet.

“I know you don’t get Elysium,” Bad whispers, and there’s something threatening to his tone. “I’m not asking you to, alright? Okay, you do not have to agree with their violence— I don’t agree with their violence.”

“Their violence that almost killed one of my friends—”

Bad nods. “Look, if you’re going to keep on making a fuss, then I’m going to have to ask you to leave.”

“Are they operating out of here—”

There’s a moment of silence, and what looks like a pager attached to his side beeps a couple of times. He picks it up and his face drops just a little.

Bad sighs, before walking towards the big vault door. “I’ll get TapL to explain.”

“I don’t want TapL to explain—”

“I’m getting him to explain, I have business to attend to,” Bad explains, one of the guards open up the vault door and Techno squints at the real sunlight this time.

“Business what the fuck?”

“I have a patient to attend to.”

“What does that mean?” The door opens and Techno squints at the light.

Wow the tunnel really fucking is dark.

“Get TapL here,” Bad says in a voice that leaves no room for argument.

Techno proceeds to not be able to see and he squints into the sun. It's not even that bright, the sun is barely peeking over the horizon.

Eventually his eyes adjust.

Then he can't breathe.

It's... beautiful, and Techno doesn't say that lightly. It's fucking stunning.

He looks around, it's almost... idyllic. He can't hear any cars or any yelling that's found early in the morning, it's been replaced by running water somewhere off in the distance. Instead of the chaos and yelling that comes with mornings in Logstedchire, there's a quiet sort of feeling here.

So he stares around him with wide eyes.

The light is filtering down in golden streaks. The early morning sun holding onto the cool sort of warmth. This that will not be found later in the day, It'll get warmer and everything will get annoyed. But right now the snippets of sun are nice on his face, hiding behind a skyline that he can't see.

All around him are what must be the remains of old apartments, they tower up a good distance. The usual grey of the concrete slabs are covered with green ivy and plants growing out of the side of windows, cascading over the side like waterfalls do cliffs.

Birds are chirping, the wind barely makes a sound. The wind that there rustles the leaves and plants that... cover everything, almost everywhere he looks there's some sort of greenery.

There's ivy climbing up the walls, rose bushes planted in little nooks and crannies. Greenery and the pale colours of flowers in early light covers everything that the greenery does not.

He manages to take a couple of steps towards a bunch of bushes bundled up at the front of an apartment, and he runs his hand across the leaves. They feel... nice on his skin, gentle almost and slightly cold from the night that is almost passed.

Flowers are also on the bushes, but they remain closed, unbothered by the sun. They will unfurl soon, opening up and becoming more than the muted colours they are and into a cascade of something.

Everything smells like... green is the only way he can describe it. Flowers and green, and the smell of soil and the morning air taints everything.

He feels dizzy in the best way possible.

This is far from the Redding Street he knows, with grey and red splattering everything. With weapons lying in secret corners and resting against every wall. The weird drug deal situation

The only red he can see is the rose bush across on the other side of the street.

He manages to step over there slowly, before crouching down in front of it.

It's all silent for a moment, his shoes are half in the dirt. He tilts his head at the rose bush. The rose bush isn't perfect, some of the flowers are too small and look like they won't unfurl, some of them aren't growing right.

"Techno." TapL deadpans.

Techno in all honestly yells and falls into the dirt patch next to him.

He looks up at TapL with the slightest scowl. “The fuck do you want?”

“Get away from the bush,” TapL says, he grabs Techno by the back of the coat and hauls him onto his feet.

“It’s just a rose bush—”

TapL looks at him like he’s just slaughtered his family and burned down his village. He opens his mouth and closes it, “It’s Squid’s grave you asshole.”

“Huh?”

TapL somehow looks even more mad at him. “You’re the fucking worst,” he mutters under his breath. “And Bad made me babysit you.”

“You don’t have to babysit me, trust me,” Techno responds.

“Gotta make sure you don’t kill anyone,” TapL mutters, it’s mostly a joke... but there’s enough seriousness in there that Techno stands up a little straighter and glares a little more at TapL.

TapL gives a sickening sweet smile. “You’re lucky Bad said that if I hurt you he’s going to be disappointed in me.”

“What is he, your parent?”

“Yeah,” TapL snaps. “Someone had to get me outta there, not all of us are allowed to walk out and face no consequences.”

Techno doesn't bother that with a response.

"So... Redding," Techno drawls and TapL's glare deepens just a little bit more. "What's the deal?"

"What's the deal?" He repeats slowly, like somehow the words are paining him, and knowing TapL, they probably are.

Techno gestures at the rose bush that he's not allowed to touch or get anywhere near, apparently. "It's so green, there's life in every corner. Last time I was here there was blood staining the ground and I almost got shot."

"When was the last time you were here?"

"Before I was a hero."

TapL whistles, "A lot has changed since then. It's been a hot moment. Basically," TapL says, he starts to walk off in a direction and Techno scrambles to keep up with him. "Bad and a couple of fighters took charge, in the eternal gang struggle here. Then they decided that they couldn't keep fighting people, and so they calmed it the fuck down, gave them a reason to try and fight for here." TapL runs a hand against the bricks of one of the apartments. "They had some money, so they got electricity and running water here again, they planted gardens and provided housing and medical care. So now Redding is a no-go zone, you can't fuck with Redding, you're just not allowed to."

"Where do the angels come into this?" Techno asks slowly.

TapL falters mid-step, he takes another deep breath before shaking his head and walking a bit faster down the middle of the street. "I can't tell you."

"Why not?"

“Because, I don’t want to.”

“So you’re allowed?”

TapL turns into one of the buildings and opens the door.

Immediately there’s the smell of oil, the sound of fryers sizzling and the general chatter that comes with a working kitchen. This room is fairly small, there’s some tables and chairs that don’t match at all scattered around and there are some people waiting at the counters.

TapL throws out an arm, like a showman showing off a new trick. “This is the chippy. Best food here. Only... takeaway food here, but that’s okay because it’s so good.”

“Why is Elysium—”

Several people from the lines turn to look at him. Hybrids of all shapes and sizes, some of them have the white streaks of feline hybrids, some of them look like shulker hybrids with bits of harder skin on their face.

TapL facepalms. “Sorry guys,” he says, before shooting Techno a dirty look. “He’s new.”

He grabs Techno by the shoulder and drags him out of there.

“Wait is that The Blade?”

TapL walks a bit faster before letting go of Techno’s shoulder and glaring.

“Why are people getting fish and chips in the morning?”

“Hash browns,” TapL says, “They make really good hash browns, at the perfect time for the end of night shift or early shift workers. Also today they’re doing lunches for anyone who needs them, free of charge.”

Right. Fair enough.

TapL keeps walking, and Techno follows after him.

“Why are Elysium here?” He asks again.

“That’s the bookstore, which is a library but called the bookstore.”

Techno glances at the building, it’s an old stone thing. It looks like it should be falling apart, but it isn’t. Ivy clammers up this wall too, and in front of two large expansive windows showing rows and rows of books there are some flower bushes.

That’s... a lot of books.

“Most of it is stuff from mobs,” TapL says, “Or banned books. Apparently they have the ancient texts by Ender themself here, I dunno how true that is, but it’s a fun story so I’m saying it now.”

Techno sighs, before grabbing TapL by the shoulder. He jumps slightly but tries to hide it, “TapL, why is Elysium here?”

TapL shakes his shoulder free and glares.

“They fund it,” TapL says slowly. “Redding. Elysium funds it, a couple of months ago Bad almost ran outta money and a newly formed Elysium offered to fix that. As long as any member could stay here if they needed it.”

Techno looks at TapL who’s shifting on his feet. He looks incredibly nervous.

He puts it together more than he’d like. “TapL... when did you move in here?”

“A couple of months ago,” TapL says.

They’re at a standoff. Techno knows TapL is with Elysium but TapL also knows that Techno can’t really do anything about it.

“You’re with them.” It’s not a question.

“I am,” TapL confirms.

Techno takes a deep breath.

Elysium is bad. That’s the assumption he’s been rolling with for so long, mostly to make himself feel better. It’s so much easier to decide everything someone does is bad because of a few actions, that way he doesn’t have to think about it.

But Elysium funds Redding, and that has to be worth *something*, he’s not sure what, but surely it’s something. Literally anything. People don’t do that unless their only job is to try and blow up a city.

There’s so much more going on here, and Techno doesn’t understand a second of it. None of it makes sense.

He opens his mouth to say something, when a flash of green catches his eye.

Looking around for the green, he squints at the figure in the distance.

Is that... Slimecicle? The vigilante who hasn't been seen in— too long. Since before Tommy got his job, and that feels like a lifetime ago.

“Slime?” Techno says slowly.

Techno hasn't ever met the man before, he's had no need to. The last time he was active the Logstedchire four weren't perceived to be the threat they were at the moment. But he's been in a couple meetings and Slimecicle has been the subject, he once outsmarted Quackity and Quackity's pride was very hurt.

So... he *thinks* that's Slime. He's not sure though.

The person who Techno *thinks* is Slimecicle, looks up slowly. He's... green and slightly transparent, which is more than terrifying. They make eye contact for a moment too long, and Slimecicle straightens up, tilting his head at Techno.

“Hello, Technoblade from Logstedchire.”

“Slimecicle... also from Logstedchire.”

He gives a bright smile, “That's what you think!”

“Huh?”

“Don't worry about it!” He says with the brightest smile.

Techno doesn't move from his spot, he keeps his arms crossed and raises an eyebrow.
“You've been here?”

“I have.” Any humour from his voice instantly drops.

Right. Okay. Slightly terrifying.

“With Elysium.” Techno settles on saying.

Slimecicle gives a smile so big it's almost scary. “Technoblade from Logstedchire... didn't you wish there was someone like Elysium when you escaped the fighting rings?” He takes a couple of steps closer, and Techno tries his best to keep his face straight. “Maybe they could've gotten you a better prosthetic—”

Techno can't stop his face from dropping. “How the *fuck* do you know that?”

“People talk, Technoblade,” Slime says with a bright smile. “Especially after you leave someone to rot.”

Okay.

Slime's just overheard TapL or whoever speaking about it— which makes that more okay.

“Be careful,” Slimecicle says, “Theseus—”

Techno doesn't try to hide the shock from his face, instead he stares, mouth slightly open. It... might make sense, but Techno doesn't have an easy justification like the other one.

Slimecicle grins a little wider. “Be careful, Technoblade— Theseus has more in common with Elysium than you think.”

“Huh?”

He gives an even bigger smile, “Theseus killed the Minotaur, right, Technoblade from Logstedchire?”

He doesn’t say anything.

“The Minotaur was made from intervention,” Slimecicle continues with ease, “Do you ever feel like a Minotaur, Technoblade from Logstedchire? Unable to control your actions, unable to do anything to change your fate. A fate that was assigned to you by someone who was not yourself?”

Techno doesn’t know what the fuck he’s supposed to say to that.

“Theseus kills the Minotaur!” Slime says again, like the thing he’s said is the funniest joke in the entire world.

“Oh— okay?”

Slimecicle heads towards a wall. There’s a gap in the wall and Slimecicle gives a great big smile before almost... melting down and almost walking through the hole in the wall.

What. The. Fuck?

Techno looks at TapL, who somehow looks just as bewildered as Techno does.

“He... normally is not like that, I have no clue what just happened. He’s normally really friendly, especially to new people.”

“Doesn’t like heroes, I guess,” Techno says slowly, looking at the gap in the wall where Slime just disappeared into. “Can’t exactly blame him.”

TapL pauses for a moment, as if Techno’s said something groundbreaking. Before shaking his head and continuing to walk down the street. This time it’s a bit slower, and Techno manages to walk in time with him.

“You’re with Elysium?”

“Yes.”

“How.” Techno says, “Why are you fighting for a cause that believes I should be dead.”

TapL shoots Techno a glance, “Tech— they knew you were at the gala... there were several high priorities at the gala that we didn’t manage to take out.”

“Okay?”

“You were not one of them,” TapL says, he doesn’t glance back at Techno. “Most of the people here know that the whole hero thing wasn’t exactly your choice.”

“It wasn’t their choice either,” Techno argues, as he steps around someone with a cart of flowers. “Like— they were all kids when they were hired, TapL, it’s a glorified fighting ring, you can’t kill people for things they did when they were kids. Some of them didn’t have the money— some of them—”

“Okay,” TapL says, he stops in his tracks and turns to look at Techno, crossing his arms. “Wilbur. Why did he become a hero?”

“Because he didn’t have any family and therefore was a ward of the state, and the state chose to put him under the guardianship of an ex-hero.”

“Which ex-hero?”

“Everyone knows this,” Techno mutters. “Phil, after he dropped out of the game, he was brought back because someone had to take care of Wilbur.”

TapL raises an eyebrow. “Okay... so why did Wilbur *have* to become a hero? He could’ve just walked away.”

“Because, they put him into the program until he passed.”

“Okay. Why is he still a hero? He has the shortest contract out of all of you—”

“How do you know that—”

“He has the shortest contract and has renewed it three times since he was first put onto the payroll. Why does he keep renewing it?”

“Because it’s all he knows, TapL!” Techno yells, he glances over his shoulder to see a couple of people giving him weird looks. “He was *ten* when he was told he was being a hero, ten and he didn’t have any other memories. He was a child, he was our age—”

“Do not compare us to *him*. ” TapL snaps.

Techno doesn’t.

“Does Wilbur deserve to die because of things out of his control? How were they gonna kill him TapL, how were they going to kill my brother?”

“Gunshot,” TapL says quietly. “Ideally in the head. One and done deal.”

Techno glares at him.

"But your PR guy got in the way, a feat that I am still beyond amazed about. We obviously did not include him in the plan, because why would we?"

"Don't you fucking think about hurting that kid in any way, shape or form. Or I will come back here and strangle you with my own bare hands."

TapL looks at him for a moment, as if he's trying to figure out whether or not Techno is joking or deadly serious.

He's serious.

TapL realises that a moment later and raises an eyebrow. "Interesting."

"I'm not kidding," they are both aware of that. "If you even look at that kid wrong I will not hesitate to come back here and arrest every person here tied to Elysium."

TapL just looks at him.

"There's a code of honour."

"As is there one not to target civilians."

That statement gets TapL to shut the fuck up and turn around before walking ahead. Techno begrudgingly follows.

TapL turns into a house, and opens the door which squeaks from the effort of it. Clearly the door is slightly busted.

Inside it's a pretty small house. They're in the kitchen, and all the lights are off. TapL flickers on the light.

It looks like a mess of a place. It's a small kitchen and living room connected to it, there's some unwashed plates sitting next to the sink, there's a TV blaring in another room and there's what sounds like chatter upstairs.

In between the kitchen and living room is a table with a bunch of maps scattered across them. TapL's eyes dart towards the maps.

He walks a bit closer up to the maps and pushes them all off the table. Techno raises an eyebrow.

“What the fuck are those?”

“Don't worry about it—”

“What am I gonna see in this house?”

What he doesn't expect to see next to him is... well Fruit.

He almost falls over.

“Fruit?” He says.

“Hi.” Fruit says, there’s a tint of amusement to his voice, and Techno’s yet to figure out how he feels about it. “Like old times, huh?”

“Y— yeah.” Techno’s brain has basically given up. See... he *knew* that Fruit wasn’t dead, he was the guy who gave him the photo of them and Squid that’s still on his desk. Like, Techno knew he wasn’t dead.

Well— okay he didn't, he is lying about that.

He was like eighty percent sure that Fruit was dead.

“You’re alive?” Is what Techno eventually manages.

Fruit just grins, “I seem pretty alive. Didn’t cark it. The gangs can’t catch me.”

Techno just looks at him, “Last time I saw you, you said you were going to die—”

“I...” Fruit gives an awkward smile. “If it helps I thought I was? I had like five separate gangs after me.”

TapL side eyes Techno, and he’s not sure how to feel about it.

“I— thought you were dead,” Techno manages. “How are you not—”

Fruit just smiles, that smile never meant anything good for anyone. Normally it meant he was about to win a fight, or beat the shit out of Techno to try get the books off of him. Techno takes a few steps back.

“Hey,” Fruit grins, leaning against the wall. “Fancy seein’ you here.”

“I—”

Techno grabs Fruit and pulls him into a hug. After a moment of apparent shock, Fruit hugs him back.

Then he punches Fruit in the arm, not overly hard but Fruit still winces.

"And that's for not telling me you're okay, you fucking asshole."

"Fair, fair," Fruit rubs his arm where Techno hit him. "I'll take that."

Techno smiles. "Holy fuck I'm so glad you're okay."

"It was touch and go for a while. But I'm okay, Business Bay were really committed to trying to kill me, but that was sorted."

"You had Business Bay after you?" Techno eventually manages, that typically didn't end well for people. "How the fuck—"

Fruit just grins. "Don't you worry about it."

"I am legitimately terrified of you."

With a shrug, Fruit turns around and starts fumbling around in the fridge. He grabs some sorta snack and throws Techno another one.

It's an apple. But its yellow.

Almost like gold.

Techno stares at the apple for a moment.

It's gold! Gold is such a neat colour, everything should be gold— golden dogs, golden food, gold shirts. As a society not enough things are golden.

Wait—

Techno doesn't even like the colour gold that much.

But it's very shiny and catches the light and that's fucking incredible, and makes it look so pretty—

He doesn't even like gold, he'd rather silver.

But gold is shinyyy.

Okay. Cool. Looks like Techno likes gold now.

The apple isn't even gold, it's like... yellow at best.

Techno looks away from the apple (which is yellow not gold) and resists the urge to keep looking back at it.

"So," Fruit takes a chunk out of his apple. "How have you been?"

"Eh, okay," Techno says.

TapL scoffs at this, because of fucking course he does. "Please, you've always had it the best of the lot of us."

Techno doesn't bother with a response. TapL is gonna say what he thinks anyways and all Techno can do is watch in mild discomfort.

All of them know that there's a truth to that too, Techno *has* always had it the best. He had the strongest powers, he was allowed to literally walk out—

He hasn't had it the greatest, but out of them he's had it the best.

TapL obviously thinks he's making some amazing point because he smiles— it's a twisted smile though, filled with enough contempt and rage to kill someone.

Techno almost feels bad for him.

“The one who manages to kill someone, walk out a couple of days later and then get picked up by some billionaire bitch who is also a hero and has a couple million dollars to throw at this charity case.”

Techno glares a little bit more, but he stays quiet.

“Mister, ‘ *oh no my life is soooo hard I get a good job and a good support system* ’. ”

“I’m a prisoner there, TapL,” Techno snaps. Finally something breaking, “I don’t *want* to be there. I’d fuckin’ rather be here.”

TapL laughs, “Oh no, isn’t it *so* difficult to make your rent and have therapy you can access without being arrested. Ender— we’d just never understand.”

“I’d rather be in this clusterfuck of an organisation,” Techno says. It’s mostly a lie, he doesn’t want to be in Elysium more than the heroes, he hates all of those options equally. “I mean, at least there’s nothing centralised here.”

“Eh—” Fruit says, which makes TapL give him a look.

Techno pauses for a moment, he’s currently talking to two people that he’s relatively close to and trusts him far more than anyone else from the hero’s tower. Two people who appear to know something about the organisation structure of the organisation that is currently kicking everyone’s asses.

He can get some info here, info that he desperately wants. Just for himself, he’s not going to tell any of the heroes (he might tell Tommy.)

“How does Elysium work?” Techno eventually manages to say, his voice shakes a little and both Fruit and TapL just give him a look. “C’mon.”

TapL sighs, before sinking down on the couch a little more and sighing heavily. “Are you gonna tell your hero buddies?”

“Is it… information I’d need to tell them?”

Fruit and TapL exchange a glance, clearly more than nervous.

“Nah— surely not.” Fruit says, “I mean, what’s the worst that can happen?”

TapL just gives him a look. “Wait, are you even a hero anymore?” He looks back at Techno screwing up his nose. “I haven’t seen you on patrol like... ever.”

“I’m off the rosters until I get my strength under control.”

“Strength?” Fruit says.

Techno gives him a look. “Hand me your phone.”

He does as he’s asked, and hands over his phone without much fanfare. Techno makes eye contact with him as he holds the phone in one hand. Almost anyone with eyes knows what he’s about to do.

Techno smiles.

“Wait—”

Without much effort, Techno balls his hand into a fist.

The phone breaks almost immediately and Techno smiles, before throwing the pieces of it on the ground. “That’s for making me think you were dead.”

“My phone!” Fruit yells, “You’re the worst.”

“At least I tell my friends if I’m alive.”

“He didn’t kill any of his friends,” TapL adds.

The mood is immediately brought down about a million notches, thank you TapL for being a bitch all the time.

Techno looks at TapL, Fruit does too. However, Fruit looks a lot more horrified than Techno does, and he looks like he’s about to legitimately start strangling TapL, right here, right now.

There was a reason Techno liked Fruit the best.

“TapL, what the fuck is wrong with you?” Fruit says slowly.

TapL shrugs and turns around, busying himself with the maps that are now scattered on the ground.

“Has he been like this all day?”

“More or less.”

“Dude, let it go, it’s been literal years—”

TapL turns around so quickly that surely he must strain some muscle in his neck or give himself whiplash or something— he glares at Fruit, before turning back around and picking up more papers.

“TapL—”

“Fruit.”

“It’s been *years*. ”

“It’s not about that,” TapL says through gritted teeth.

“Kinda seems like it is, man—”

“Shut up,” both Fruit and TapL snap at the same time.

Techno shuts up.

“Then what is it about?” Fruit says, “Dude is here for a reason, you don’t need to drag up all that trauma that he’s probably gotten over—” Fruit pauses before looking at Techno. “Have you gotten over that trauma?”

“Absolutely not.”

“The trauma that he’s still recovering from!” Fruit says, apparently not missing a beat, he looks back at Techno again. “Have you gone to therapy for that?”

“Yes.”

“Of course he has!” TapL says.

“We are not fighting because Techno goes to therapy,” Fruit snaps.

They’ve always been like this, Techno realises. Even when they had no reason to be fighting, they’d be fighting over *something*. It just appears that Techno is the thing they’ve decided to argue over.

One time they had an argument about whether tomato sauce was a smoothie or not, and if Techno remembers that correctly Bad had stepped in because TapL threw a book at Fruit's head and gave him a concussion.

Fun times.

TapL picks up a book that's on the table.

Oh okay—

“No.” Techno says, before moving in between TapL and Fruit.

“I will throw this book at you.”

“Do it.”

TapL does it.

Techno catches the book before it can hit him, before launching it back at TapL.

TapL hits the floor with a thump and a scream.

Techno looks back at Fruit who has his mouth half open.

“He's fine.”

“My ribs!”

“Yeah, he’s fine,” Techno says. “Get up you wuss, I’ve seen you take a staff to the head and laugh.”

“Ow!” TapL says, “I’m telling Bad, fuck you.”

“He’ll be on my side,” Techno says, there’s a grin in his voice that he can’t suppress. “I’m just the poor lost hero who needed help.”

Somehow *this* is the most murderous that Techno has seen TapL throughout the entire (painful) time they’ve spent together. Techno actually believes that if TapL could, he’d rip Techno limb from limb.

Too bad he can’t!

Sucks to suck.

“Okay now that we’ve established that I can fucking beat up the both of you, how does Elysium work?”

“Why do you wanna know?” TapL says, “Fruit and I are kinda in the middle of something—”

“No we’re not.”

“Yes we are.”

“We’re not.”

“Kinda seems like you are,” Techno adds.

Now he knows what the next response will be. TapL will disagree with him, and crack and then tell Techno what he wants to know.

Sometimes it’s slightly concerning that he knows these two idiots so well and it’s been *years*. Literal years and he can still predict their actions. And some small childish part of Techno’s brain wonders if they also know him, as well as they did years ago.

He thinks he’s changed.

He’s not sure if he has.

“No, fuck you,” TapL snaps. He glares a bit harsher and sits up. “Basically, in Elysium there are like eleven branches—”

“TapL!”

“Eleven branches!” TapL speaks over Fruit who does not appear to be a fan.

“Lalalala, he can’t hear, he can’t hear you talking about all of our secrets—”

“Basically, at the top you have Hyacinth.”

“Hyacinth?” Fruit says, “No one fucking calls them that, it’s Chloris—”

“Isn’t it Adonis?” TapL says, “Adonis or Hyacinth.”

Techno pauses. “Adonis and Hyacinth both die... why the fuck would you—”

“Okay, maybe it’s Peresphone and Chloris!” TapL throws his hands in the air. “It’s not like anyone’s keeping the stories straight.”

Huh. Okay.

Techno should really be taking notes.

“Basically it’s divided into like ten—”

“Eleven.”

“Categories, or like branches,” TapL says, he lays down so he’s on the floor and uses the space in front of him like some sort of whiteboard that he’s not thinking too hard about. “So you got like... I dunno, what do we have?”

“... medical care?”

“Yeah!” TapL says, “We got like a bunch of side bitches.”

“What?”

“Branches,” Fruit sighs. “It’s not really like a centralised organisation, some of the branches will never deal with each other... like PHEME and Ambrose.”

Techno pauses for a moment, just looking at his friend with wide eyes. “No way... did you nerds all give yourself code names based on Greek mythology.”

Fruit and TapL exchange a glance with each other. Something that is more than nervous at best.

“Nah...” TapL has about the convincing ability of a fish as he says it, so Techno raises his eyebrows further. “Okay yeah, but we didn’t choose them. Who chose them?”

“Chloris.”

“I swear it’s Hyacinth.”

“I just don’t think it is.”

“Why would it be Chloris?”

Fruit looks at Techno, “Why is it Chloris?”

“Uh— most people said she resided in Elysian,” Techno says slowly. “And she’s probably the reason that Hyacinth and Adonis turned into flowers. But there are like three or four different Chloris’s in mythology.”

“There are?” TapL says, “Who the fuck are the others?”

“I dunno, morals probably. The word Chloris probably meant green or yellow, so...”

“Our glorious leader, Green,” Fruit deadpans. “What if we just call them that—”

“What if we don’t?” TapL adds, he sounds a bit tired as he says it, like he’s already sick of Fruit’s bullshit, which honestly— that’s kinda fair. Techno’s been there before, it happens. “Ah yes, let’s refer to our boss, as Green.”

The words don’t sink in as quickly as Techno would like them to.

Their... boss.

Fruit looks nervous.

“Your boss?” Techno repeats slowly. He walks around the table and glances at one of the papers.

It’s what looks like a layout of City Hall.

Techno’s heart drops to the floor.

Slowly he puts the piece of paper down and looks up at TapL and Fruit, he doesn’t try to school his expression or anything of the sort.

“You’re a branch leader,” Techno says quietly. He tries to keep his voice flat, and eventually he takes a deep breath. He manages to plaster a smile on his face, which makes Fruit and TapL slightly nervous. “What branch?”

“Fighting...” Fruit says slowly. “The Androktasiai for the collective. Athena and Ares for the leaders—”

"You're the leaders."

Neither of them deny it.

"Of the branch that attacked the gala."

They also don't deny that.

Techno takes a deep breath. "Did you order the attack?"

TapL stands up a little straighter and looks Techno in the eyes. "Yes. We planned the attack.

Techno's heart drops again.

They... they almost fucking killed Fundy. They tried to kill Wilbur and they could've killed so many more that Techno cares about.

A moment of silence.

"You fucking tried to kill my nephew?" Techno yells, and finds himself moving before he can even think of stopping himself.

TapL responds with drawing a knife, and they're at a sort of inpass.

Then Techno decides he does not give a single shit if TapL stabs him, and jumps at him. He manages to knock TapL over. TapL hits the ground with a thump and Techno grabs the knife from out of the wood of the tree.

"If it makes you feel better," TapL yells, "Wilbur was the target."

Shockingly enough, it does not make him feel better.

There's the noise of a door opening.

"Oh dear." Bad says.

TapL drops his knife and they both glance at each other before looking at Bad.

It feels a bit like old times, Bad trying to control them in the rings because he was the only one old enough to realise it wasn't them against each other, it was the group of them against what felt like the world.

Fruit doesn't say anything, because he's a bitch, instead he snickers into his hand.

Bad gives him a look and he shuts up.

"Techno, come walk with me— now that's sorted out."

"Is it?" TapL starts.

"It's sorted," Bad says with a sort of finality that makes TapL shut up and cross his arms, he mutters something under his breath but Bad is already leading him down the bustling streets —

Well bustling feels a bit kind.

Not with people anyway, it's more green than grey. With flowers and plants lining everywhere they can, ivy climbs up walls and flowers are slowly starting to unfurl in the morning light. Techno's not sure how this place has been missed.

He puts his hand up towards the rising sun, squinting through the golden light that floods everything in a warm glow. It almost looks homely, with people walking around. Some kids are attempting some sort of game that Techno doesn't know, but it involves a shulker hybrid trying to take stuff off of the others heads.

It used to be grey last time Techno was here, and he'd be lucky if there wasn't blood on the floor. Now there are kids here who look like they belong, and greenery clambering up everything, gardens and mini-shops and people laughing and he swears there's music in the background if he tries hard enough to hear.

"I see— Redding has changed a lot?" Techno says slowly, squinting and looking at Bad.

Bad gives a small smile and shrugs slightly. "Just better management I'd say," they walk in silence for a couple more steps before Bad sighs. "How's the... hybridness going?"

"Okay," Techno says slowly. "Fuckin' hurts sometimes."

Bad nods, before turning into one of the apartments littering the sides of the streets. He moves back a curtain of vines and Techno follows after him. It's quiet, and there's a meeting table in the middle of the room.

There's a couple of knives embedded into the table, but Techno somehow doesn't find himself too worried about it. The room is rather dark, there's a lightswitch but Bad walks past it and sits down at the table.

Techno sits down across from him, and he is currently under the most stress he's been under in a while. Especially with the sad look in Bad's eyes.

"So... how much do you know about blue hybrids?"

"Nothing," Techno says slowly, he tries to think back to anything he knows. "I think it's a thing mostly in Logsted?"

“Nope,” Bad says with a sad smile, “It’s in Kinoko and Lower L’Manberg and Middle L’Manberg and everywhere. It’s an issue within L’Manberg though— it’s just most prevalent in Logstedchire because blue useage is the highest there.”

“Right.”

Bad nods, “So, you really know nothing? Even after the rings?”

“I was too young to understand what was going on half the time.”

Bad sighs, “Okay. So... how blue works is that it heightens your hybrid genetics already in you and basically makes them super excited.”

“Right.”

“With both blue types this effect is multiplied, and basically those genes get so overworked that it starts mutating, connecting to other cells, generally causing issues.”

Techno nods slowly, it seems to make sense. Some at least, slightly terrifying but it makes sense.

Bad doesn't say anything and Techno keeps pacing back and forth.

He pauses. "How bad will the mutations get?"

"What do you mean?"

"Will they throw me in Pandora's? And I can only speak in grunts and snorts and fucking whatever else and trapped inside my own body? What the fuck will happen to me Bad?"

Bad sighs. "You've only been blued once, it won't progress much further. You'll get taller, you'll get stockier, you might get different instincts— and yes sometimes you'll chuff."

"Once?" Techno says slowly. "You can get blued more than once?"

"In theory you can get blued thousands of times," Bad says. "It'll go back to the hybrid type before the first one. So do you know any other hybrid types in your family?"

"Uh— some distant great-aunt was a rabbit hybrid. I think?"

"So, if you got blued *again*. You'd become a rabbit and piglin hybrid, and that would probably kill you."

"Why?"

"Because those hybrid types aren't really compatible. However, with a Hoglin hybrid, you'd be more likely to survive two bluiings."

Techno just stares at him. "No one thought to tell me this?"

"Most people don't know... Being blued more than once will multiply those mutations thousands of times. It will hurt you to the point walking is hard, let alone talking."

"Cool," Techno says tiredly. "Great."

There's a note of heavy silence, and Bad moves so he's in the seat next to him rather than the one across from him. They just... sit there, in silence, in a sort of understanding welcoming silence that Techno will probably never forget.

Bad can't say anything to make this better, and Techno knows that he's not going to try. It's a sort of all encompassing welcoming that... he can't quite bring himself to hate. He can try, fuck, he can try.

It's quiet.

"What do I do?" Techno asks again. "What... *can* I do?"

Bad doesn't say anything, and Techno knows that he himself doesn't have an answer, Techno doesn't really have an answer for himself. There's so much he can do, but there's very little he's sure about.

Theseus. Tommy.

It might be the only thing that Techno's even tried to be sure about in his life, he knows that Tommy needs help to control whatever the fuck happened last night. Tonight? A couple of hours ago.

Prime, it's only been a couple of hours.

He needs to focus on something else, almost anything else. "Elysium," Techno manages instead of anything else. "What... huh?"

Bad somehow seems even more tired than he was a couple of moments ago. "Elysium promised they would fund Redding, whatever we needed... if I promised them two things. One, any of their members could reside here if they needed, and two, to be in charge of the medical aspect."

Techno shoots back from his seat. “You too? You’re also a branch leader? First TapL and Fruit and now you—”

“And Nestor,” Bad says, “Nestor is also one...”

“He was still in the rings not that long ago!”

“Elysium saves people from the rings, Techno,” Bad says, and Techno just looks at him. “They take them down. Any of the people are allowed to join Elysium, but they don’t have to and will still have Elysium’s support.”

Techno’s mouth falls open. “Elysium takes in the ex-fighters?”

“Yes,” Bad says quietly. “They fund Redding, food banks. There’s a reason people are following them Techno. People don’t follow causes without reason, you have to do something that people will benefit from. In this case it’s... helping each other because no one else will do it.”

“You mean the heroes.”

“No,” Bad shakes his head and almost laughs. “The heroes are a tiny part of a great issue. But they’re so easy to blame for everything. The heroes don’t enforce their rules, most of them are great people.”

Techno doesn’t say anything.

“You don’t need to agree with me. I think Elysium are doing good work, work that needs to be done. They have good intentions, just...”

“Interestin’ methods?” Techno almost yells, “They almost killed Fundy.”

Bad nods. “They did.”

“To prove a point!”

“Yeah.”

“TapL ordered the killing of my brother.”

Bad pauses, it’s long enough that Techno realises and they both look at each other. It appears Bad was completely aware of this *tiny* factor and didn’t think to mention it. Techno wants to scream at him, he wants to scream at TapL.

It’s not Wilbur’s fault.

Techno glares at Bad. “Who’s the leader?”

“I don’t know.”

“Tell me!”

“We don’t know, the leaders of branches do not know. Only Eris knows.”

“Eris?”

“The right-hand,” Bad explains gently. “The person who Chloris— or whatever you’d like to call them gets information from. It goes up the chain of command, so you report to a leader, leader reports to Metis.”

“Metis?”

Bad manages a short laugh, “We call them our union rep. They’re a way to get information around quickly, I do not know who they are, and I don’t intend to find out.”

Techno opens his mouth and closes it.

“What branch is Nestor in?”

“Excuse me?”

“Theseus... had a run in with Nestor— and his powers went a bit wrong, I wanna know why he would be going after Theseus.”

“Dunno, Nestor’s not a fighting or intelligence branch.”

Techno sits back down and crosses his arms.

He takes a deep breath. "I— I need to ask you a huge favour."

"Yeah?"

"Theseus. Last night. He... I don't know what happened but he did something to this man. He was shaking and his eyes were red and— I don't know how to fix this one Bad."

Bad pauses. "Start from the start."

Techno takes a deep breath. "I was with the kid and I saw— our ring leader."

Bad's eyes go wider.

"Kid... has some trauma and stuff with the guy. I think he hurt some people really important to him— me included. And so, when he chased after us the kid decided he needed to know some stuff and beat the fuck outta the dude," Techno manages the smallest smile. "Really muffined him up."

That makes Bad laugh slightly.

"Then, I stepped in. I think I had a panic attack or something because I was really freaking out— and then I realise that the kid was gonna kill him."

The silence settles.

"And— I see him like myself. He's just a kid, and— I *know* how much killing people does to you. Especially when you can just walk away."

Bad nods slowly.

"I stopped him, but then that shithead of a man tried to stab me. And— then both of their eyes went red, and the ring leader started crying— and—" he buries his face in his hands. "I dunno what to do."

Bad pauses for a moment. "Both of their eyes went red?"

"Yeah."

Another moment of silence. "What are Theseus's powers?"

"Energy manipulation, mostly telekinesis."

"Electricity?" Bad asks slowly.

"I— I don't think so?"

"Are you sure? Cameras? Phones? Have you ever seen any of those things messed up by his powers?"

Techno pauses, because he's not... not sure. He can't remember cameras cutting out (because when Tommy uses his powers around the tower *SOMEONE* has to go through the footage and delete it all because Tommy is an oblivious fucker.)

He really can't think of a time when it just... doesn't record. Or there's interference or anything—

Wait.

When the tower got attacked, on Tommy's first day of the job. When Techno still thought that Tommy was the thing that was going to kill them all, he'd tried looking at any footage and the only footage was the footage that Dream had showed them.

There was a bunch of weird red spots, which *was* weird and how dodgy the cameras got at that time.

Or when that flashbang thing happened, and Tommy wiped out the cameras and all the power on the block.

Techno's mouth falls open. "Oh," he says quietly, "Okay. Yeah... one time, the cameras were slightly messed around with. The footage was grainier and had some like... red spots in it? So yeah, I'd say so. And then recently he knocked out the power on an entire block."

Bad nods before sighing. "Techno... memories and the human brain are basically just electrical pulses sending messages. If you hit enough of those, you can give people memories."

"Well, fuck." Techno says.

"Language," Bad adds, but it's half hearted at best. "Techno. At any point did—the person snap out of it for a moment?"

"Yeah," Techno nods, "Called the kid a freak of nature of somethin'."

Bad's mouth falls slightly open and it looks like he frowns, it's hard to tell however. "Huh."

The pacer that's attached to Bad beeps and Bad frowns slightly. "Follow me," is what Bad says, and Techno follows after him.

They walk down the street more, some people nod to Bad and then whisper about Techno following him. Techno does his best to ignore the whisperings and chatterings, this will probably get out.

Tommy's gonna have to deal with this, with people seeing him in Redding, and... that's a future problem.

With a sigh he follows after Bad, he walks down to what appears to be a far away corner of his entire establishment.

There's a small building, Bad opens the door before pausing and turning around to look at Techno. He opens his mouth and then closes it.

Instead he walks through the door.

The room smells of medical supplies and the general smell of cleaning products and fake lemon. There's a certain feel in the room, and it's not a happy one. People are shuffling and blankets are ruffling as people move around in them, it's rather quiet.

Bad's footsteps are just about the loudest thing as he walks through the room.

The room itself is simple enough, it's two rows of bed, one pushed against each wall. Meaning that there's an aisle down the middle, Bad seems to have an awful amount of confidence.

What makes Techno pause is some of the people in the beds, they look like they're in an inch within their life. One of them looks at him and tilts their head, they look abnormally pale, and Techno doesn't know whether they're a skeleton hybrid or just very sick.

At the end of the aisle is some sort of hybrid, they're being held back by two people and they're thrashing.

Bad walks up to them, before placing his hand against their forehead.

Their eyes flash red and they go limp for a moment, before standing up slightly straight.

Their eyes aren't red for a split second, they look at Bad with wide eyes. Before another flash of red and their hand twitches.

It's... what Tommy did last night.

Techno's eyes widen, and Bad turns around to face him.

The other two people man-handle the apparently violent hybrid back into bed, and Techno let's his mouth fall open.

"Is that what he did?" Bad asks from the other side of the room.

Techno nods.

He takes a few more steps so the gap isn't as big. "Was he shaking more?"

He nods again, unable to even think of how to form words.

It doesn't make sense— how the fuck did Tommy do that. Does Tommy even know he can do that? What did Bad just do to that person and why did they stop fighting?

"What— the fuck?" Techno eventually manages.

"Give someone a good memory, and they'll stop fighting."

Techno's mouth falls open. "I'm fucking terrified of you."

"Techno..." Bad says slowly, "I forgot to mention something."

"Yeah?"

"Being blued. It won't kill you but... it hurts."

"Huh?" Techno looks up at him.

Bad sighs, he actually seems upset about this and that breaks Techno's heart just a little.

"Because your body isn't... supposed to be twisting the way it is, muscles aren't supposed to be bending and moving. So some days it's really going to hurt. It's basically like chronic pain. You will... have to deal with that a lot. It's basically chronic pain. Just... a lot of the time, and most painkillers aren't gonna be strong enough to deal with that."

"What do I do?" Techno mutters. "How do I explain that—"

Bad looks at him from a long moment. "You're in the only place where people understand."

"But they won't!" Techno yells. He shoots back from his chair that matters onto the ground and starts walking back and forth back and forth. "Wilbur, Phil, Niki— Dream, none of them will get it and I *need* them to get it. Tommy's gonna—"

Tommy's gonna blame himself.

If it really hurts as much as Bad is warning him— it's gonna really fucking hurt and Tommy's gonna blame himself. Wilbur and Phil are gonna blame Theseus— and Tommy's gonna blame himself and Techno doesn't know how he's supposed to deal with that. They're gonna blame Tommy— oh God Tommy's gonna blame himself.

Techno's heart seizes in his throat, he can't breathe— he can't—

They're going to blame Tommy, they're going to blame Theseus for this— for the pain and the hurt and Tommy's going to destroy himself because of it.

He fumbles for the door, opening it and running.

He has no clue where he goes, his feet carry him the entire way, not his head. Somehow he ends up in some dodgy bathroom.

Dropping to the ground, he leans over the toilet bowl and gags.

He balls his hands into fists and tries to breathe, no matter how quickly he breathes it feels like no air is entering his lungs. His head feels dizzy, he can't breathe— he can't breathe— he needs to be able to breathe, why can't he breathe?

Is he going to die like this?

He can't— air, he needs air, why isn't the air working? It doesn't make sense, he's breathing but not enough. His head is spinning, he feels like passing out would be easier than this. So, so much easier than this.

His heart is beating in his throat, it's too fast, everything is too fast, he doesn't know what he's supposed to do—

There's a knock on the door.

Techno ignores it.

There's another knock on the door, and Techno wants to ignore it, really he does. But he can't breathe and he can't think and he can't do anything apart from trying to breathe, but that's not going well because he can't breathe.

“Techno,” the voice says, and that’s TapL, he knows that’s TapL but still he can’t breathe. He just needs to be able to breathe and then everything will be alright, if he can slow down and focus on his breathing then that will be good enough for him.

Okay.

Deep breaths.

He needs to be calmer.

He can breathe, just in and out one at a time. Like... his therapist taught him, maybe, he can’t really remember if his therapist taught him this. It might’ve been Wilbur, Wilbur was always good at handling this sorta stuff.

“Tech?” TapL says, slower this time, like he’s realising something. “Are you alright buddy?”

“Fine,” Techno manages to gasp out between wheezing breaths. “I’m fine— I’m great.”

A wave of nausea washes over Techno and his stomach leaps, he holds onto the toilet bowl, willing himself not to throw up. He does not need to be doing that, he’s fine, he’s great even. He’s having *the best* time.

He can’t breathe— why do his lungs hurt so much? He just needs to breathe, in and out, he needs to not throw up and he needs to not think about anything in his life at the moment.

TapL for some unknown reason doesn’t trust his *very convincing* act and so the door opens.

It is probably not a pretty sight, Techno basically laying over a toilet bowl, heaving and trying to breathe with little success.

To his surprise TapL doesn't make fun of him, he sits on the floor next to Techno. "Okay, you need to breathe."

"Fucking— thanks," Techno manages between gasping breaths.

"Okay, okay," TapL does an over-exaggerated breath, in and out. "Just try to copy me, if you can't, that's okay. In and out."

Techno tries to copy him, he really does, but he can't, and that freaks him out even more. His breathing goes back to rapid, and his heart starts thumping impossibly loud, it's almost the only thing he can hear.

He's aware Chat is losing their fucking minds.

L

L

L

Technosad

BREATHE IDIOT

L

He slaps his hands over his ears, he needs Chat to shut up— he needs his heart to stop beating so fast in his chest. He needs TapL to stop talking to him, and he needs to be able to sort through his thoughts but he can't sort through his thoughts because *he can't fucking breathe*.

His lungs ache from the lack of air that he has to be experiencing.

It's too loud, it's all too loud, it's too loud.

He wants Wilbur.

He wants his brother.

It's too loud.

“Tech,” it's TapL again, somehow that's managed to be the thing that gets through to him.
“You're okay, alright? You're safe. No one's gonna hurt you, and you're alright.”

He's lyingggg

Blood, blood, blood, blood

L + ratio .

BLOOD

BLOOD

BLOOD

“You're alright,” TapL says and Techno finds it hard to believe him. “You're okay. Alright?”

Techno shakes his head, grabbing at his hair.

“Hey, hey, hey, no, don't be doing that,” TapL's hands grab his wrists, and Techno loosens his own grip on his hair. He eventually lets go and TapL lets go of him, moving back a little. “In and out, you got this Tech.”

Techno's first attempt is shuddering, and waivers half way through. He looks at TapL with wide desperate eyes. “I can't—I can't—they're gonna blame him—I can't breathe—”

“You can,” TapL’s voice is surprisingly strong. “In and out, okay? In and out.” He does another exaggerated breath and Techno follows that, it doesn’t shake this time and he can manage to get some air in his lungs.

They sit there for what feels like years, Techno struggling to breathe and TapL just sitting there with him. Telling him that it’s alright, even when Techno panics again and air doesn’t work properly.

He calms down after what feels like forever, his breathing is still slightly shaky, as are his hands. But he’s breathing, he can speak, and TapL is still here. Sitting on the floor of a dingy bathroom next to Techno.

“You need to go home,” is what TapL says, “Being here is not helping you at all.”

“But—”

“But, nothing,” TapL says, “You gotta go home, you have people who need you there. You’re destroying yourself here, it’s like Googling symptoms, a terrible idea all around. Did you get the answers you wanted?”

“Yes.”

“Then you should go home,” TapL says, he basically picks Techno up off the floor and sets him on his feet. “Okay, you got Wilbur, you got Philza, you have a bunch of people who you need to see, and you’re probably worrying them by being here.”

Techno pauses for a moment.

Before he relents.

He nods and TapL gives a smug smile, it screams '*I told you so*' and he is very lucky that Techno's limbs are still struggling to work otherwise he'd probably hit TapL into another dimension, send him flying straight through a wall.

That would be nice.

Kinda.

TapL basically leads him back through the sewer that is de-sewerfied, he nods at the guards who have switched over and he gets a nod back from each and every one of them.

Eventually they pause in front of the ramp that leads back up into the outside world.

He has to go back home.

Well—

Home is a complex word.

TapL doesn't glare at him anymore, he doesn't look happy, but he doesn't look like he wants to kill Techno and his entire family. "You know some of the people here call the hero agency Tautarus?"

"Feels like that sometimes," Techno mutters. He looks at the entrance. He has a family who is not here, he can't exactly just drop them because some people understand him. "Aren't Tartarus and Elysium the opposite?"

"Think so," TapL shrugs a shoulder, "Was never as interested in myths as you."

"It was like the only book there," Techno deadpans. "It was that, or Shakespeare or— what was the other one?"

"That huge encyclopedia," TapL says, and he's not smiling but he's not frowning either and that feels a bit like a win. "It had this beautiful anatomical sketch of a dog right?"

"I think so."

They're silent again, but it doesn't feel as stunted as before. Only a little bit stunted.

Which he'll count as a win.

TapL takes a deep breath and closes his eyes. "Why didn't you come back for us?"

"They moved you." Techno replies.

TapL looks at him with wide eyes. "No they didn't."

"They drugged you and moved you. As soon as I could I went back, ready to blow that place to kingdom come and nothing was there."

TapL looks at him. "I don't forgive you."

"I don't forgive myself either."

"You didn't keep looking."

"I didn't."

"Nestor and Calvin only got out because of Elysium."

"I— know." Techno says. "And I hate to say that."

TapL gives a slight smile. "Now don't go telling your hero friends what you found out. Honour among thieves."

Techno rolls his eyes. "I'm not a nark."

"You're a bit of a nark—"

"I am not!"

TapL laughs, and it might be the first time he's laughed while Techno's been around.

A moment of silence.

"I'm not gonna stop trying to kill heroes."

"And I'm gonna keep trying to stop you."

"And I am going to fight like nothing else."

"I know." Techno says, and he does know. "But they're my family, and I don't expect you to understand."

"And these guys are mine," TapL says quietly.

They both look at each other because they don't have any other option. TapL sighs and runs a hand down his face.

"You're always welcomed back," TapL says slowly, keeping his gaze on Techno. "You're kinda one of us."

"I'm not."

"Techno, you hate the heroes more than I do. You can see it whenever someone brings them up, your face darkens and it looks like you're gonna chuck. You *hate* them, maybe not the individuals, but you hate them."

Techno stays quiet.

"There will always be a spot in Elysium, if you want to take it," TapL says quietly.

Techno ignores him, and steps through the door. Closing it softly behind him, before walking up the ramp. The crate that's actually the door closes behind him.

Then Techno is left standing on his own behind the back of a crappy fish factory.

He takes a steadying breath, closing his eyes and letting himself... he's not quite sure. It feels like mourning, but there's little left to mourn. He doesn't want to be with Elysium, he loves Wilbur and Phil a lot and doesn't want to leave them.

But... they don't *understand*.

They can't look at him and say that they understand what he's going through, what he's been through. They can't say that because it's a lie, they don't understand and they won't understand.

Techno sighs, before he starts to walk.

The thought of Tommy blaming himself, and Phil and Wilbur blaming Theseus don't seem to leave his head no matter how much he tries, although that might be Chat. It's been harder and harder to separate them from his own thoughts recently, Chat's calmed down but his own thoughts haven't.

L

Oh no, that's Chat.

Maybe that's not that difficult and he can stop being on whatever character arc you'd call this.

It's quiet, for about ten in the morning. There are some cars moving about, and the sun's actually in the sky. It's peaceful, all things considered. For a Saturday morning, Tommy's... well probably in hospital if he's being completely honest.

Maybe being questioned?

Techno trusts the combined effort of Wilbur and Phil to keep him safe, and Purpled. That kid is about three seconds away from fighting a cop and Techno can not blame him. He just hopes that he has enough bail money.

He probably does.

Fingers crossed.

The walk is almost silent, and Techno walks with his hands in his pockets. Nothing feels different, everyone's side-glancing him the way everyone side-glances each other in Logstedchire.

It's kinda like a sign that you know each other, the side-eyes and the second glances and the general scowl. Wilbur doesn't quite get it, he's getting there though. Between all of the side-eyeings and general scowling that Techno gives everyone, they're starting to get it.

Techno might be a stereotypical example of someone from Logstedchire, always glaring and looking mad... maybe that's a negative stereotype... Techno decides not to think about that too much and instead continue walking.

The walk is quiet.

His footsteps skid across the ground, being the only noise that he really registers. Somewhere in the back of his mind he's aware of the cars and the buses and people laughing and people in the park but none of it registers.

"Huh," Techno says to no one in particular.

The realisation has set in, and Techno... feels nothing about it. He feels... a mixture of scared and tired and he wants to cry but he also wants to laugh because *of course* this is how his life goes.

Of course having a prosthetic leg and severe amounts of trauma and being a hero weren't enough for him. Of course the universe decided to throw some chronic pain on top of it all.

He reaches for his phone—he has to call Phil, surely, he owes Phil that much at least?

He can't.

He'll figure it out— he'll figure out that Tommy caused this indirectly and he can not cope with that now.

Techno takes a deep breath and tries to steady his thoughts. Okay. He just needs to figure out his next course of action.

So he starts slowly on his walk back, hands in his pocket and eyes on the things flying around in the air. Odd leaves and bits of paper and the way the sun is shining over anything with the promise that it'll be fucking stinking hot later.

It's nice.

The walk back is nice, Techno focuses on the things that he can control. Tommy not getting caught, looking at the cute dog across the footpath and crossing the road to give it some pets with an owner who is delighted about the entire thing. Trying to make sure Wilbur is okay. He has some control and he plans to use it, the best he can.

He stops in front of where he knows Niki's cafe is.

It's down a road that's in the opposite way to the hospital.

He hesitates. He has to tell Niki— surely he has to tell her, at the least, they co-parent a dog together.

The bakery is a small thing, but it's filled with life and love. The bakery itself is painted a sage green, something that Techno actually helped with when it first opened. In the middle is a dark oak door, well he's not sure if it's oak, but it's some sort of dark wood.

There's a few stairs leading up to the door and huge windows out the front. One of the displays have some cakes standing on very nice looking stands, and the other appears to have bread baskets sitting on racks.

Out the front are a couple of chairs and tables, an older woman is sitting at the chair reading her newspaper. She looks rather peaceful. Someone walks out of the bakery in what appears to be a rush, and Techno steps out of the way of them.

He walks up to the door and opens the door with a bell chime.

It smells like bread, freshly made bread, which isn't overly shocking considering it's a bakery. It's nice though, Techno can get used to this. It's relatively quiet, there's some people up at the main display case that the cash register is settled on.

Niki's standing at the counter, taking someone's order.

Her hair's blonder than it was last time Techno saw her, which was... like yesterday morning. She nods at something someone's said, and then grabs a pair of tongs before grabbing a pastry from the display case.

She looks over, and makes eye contact with Techno.

She raises an eyebrow, "Techno?"

"Niki," Techno manages, despite the lump in his throat that almost hurts. "Hi..."

She tilts her head at him, before gesturing at him to come up to the counter. He does that on shaky legs that threaten to give out the entire way.

She looks at him for a moment longer, "I think it's a hot chocolate sort of day."

Techno nods.

Niki gestures for Techno to follow, and he does, behind the counter and into what looks like a kitchen.

There's a couple of people around, apparently just finishing up cleaning and what-not, none of them even give Techno a glance, which is nice. It smells like pastries and bread and is much warmer than outside. There's flour covering most surfaces and Techno has a few questions about it, but he's not going to question it too hard.

Grabbing two chairs, she moves them so they're slightly out of the way of the bakers still cleaning and some of them who are still trying to get stuff out of the oven.

Techno sits down in one of them, basically letting his shaking limbs give up. Niki bustles around, apparently looking for mugs to make hot chocolate with. She eventually finds them and goes quiet.

The barista machine squeals for a moment, and then Niki manages to get back to the seat and hands Techno a warm mug of hot chocolate.

Niki's always made it the best.

For a moment they sit in silence, sipping at hot chocolates that are way too warm and burn their tongues. Techno manages to laugh slightly about it because he will not be able to taste anything for a few days (at best).

Niki gives a gentle smile, "We don't have any marshmallows, I believe that Cress took them all."

Someone makes a noise of offence, "I did not—"

A moment of silence.

“Okay maybe I did.”

Niki just smiles a little wider, she takes a look at the expression on Techno’s face and her expression drops a little. “Are you okay, Techno?”

“Yeah— kinda— it’s—” Techno runs a hand through the short strands of hair, wow, his hair is not pretty at all. He needs to wash his hair. “Yes. But no.”

“Hmm,” Niki says quietly, she leans back in her chair, clearly giving Techno her full attention and he’s eternally grateful for that.

“I—” he glances around the room. There’s still too many people around. “Don’t want to say.”

The unspoken ‘*with these people around*’ goes unspoken and Niki nods, she stands up offers her hand to Techno. Techno takes it and the two amble towards the front door.

Niki holds the door open for him, which is rather polite of her.

Techno sits down on one of the outside seats, the lady with her newspaper is gone and it’s relatively quiet out here.

Niki sits across from him and puts her hot chocolate on the table.

Techno takes a deep breath.

For some reason this isn't difficult to tell Niki, to even rationalise or think about telling anyone else in his life makes him want to be sick. But Niki's looking at him without judgement and she knows him.

Sometimes it feels like Niki knows him the best.

"So..." Techno says slowly, "The whole blue thing... right?"

"I am aware of it," she deadpans.

"Yeah..." Techno trails off, "Basically. Those mutations are really gonna fuck with my body and it's gonna like... hurt pretty bad."

Niki leans forward, it's an invitation that Techno doesn't have to take, but he wants to.

"Basically," Techno says, "Chronic pain. It's not gonna do like long-lasting damage... but someday's it's gonna hurt a lot. And I don't want to try to explain that because they won't get it and they'll blame Theseus and the kid doesn't need that on top of all his current shit."

Niki takes a deep breath, "Okay," she says, "You don't need to tell anyone, but if you want to, I'm here for you."

Techno nods, before picking up his hot chocolate and burning his tongue on said hot chocolate because he's someone who should not be trusted in society, and it's a crime to say that he isn't.

"Does anyone else know?"

"You're the first person I've told."

“Okay,” Niki says, they sit in the silence for a few moments, she’s obviously trying to think, and Techno doesn’t have many other places to be. “Do they know that you’re here? Or that you’re okay.”

Techno pauses.

He did... fuck off without much of an explanation, and he hasn’t checked his phone in a hot second.

He grabs his phone, looks at the sheer amount of notifications before deciding that no, he will not be dealing with that, and puts his phone face down on the table. “No,” Techno says, “I forgot to tell them— well anything.”

Niki looks a bit more tired, “Okay, you want to tell them you’re okay. You don’t have to go back, but you need to at least tell them that you’re not in some ditch somewhere.”

“Can I use those exact words?”

“No.”

“Fine.”

Techno picks up his phone.

He has no fewer than forty notifications, about twenty of those are from Wilbur. Five are from Phil, there’s one from Purpled but the rest are all Tommy. On closer inspection Tommy just sent him pictures of raccoons.

Okay then—

He decides to text Phil.

The Weird Street Rat:

I am safe

Then he puts his phone down, because he's not dealing with that right now. He can deal with that later, if not at all.

"You don't need to tell them what's happening," Niki says.

"I know. I want to— but I can't— I can't have them blaming the kid."

"Alright... alright," Niki says softly, "That's okay. We can deal with it. If we can co-parent our chaotic dog, we can figure this out."

Techno grabs his hot chocolate again.

"You're going to make me cry."

Niki doesn't fall for the bait like Techno would have hoped she does.

"Don't bottle it up," Niki says. "Alright?"

"Alright," Techno sighs, "You really got rid of all of my coping methods."

“Yes, yes I did,” she sounds slightly smug about it, and Techno can’t hold that against her, because she did almost single-handedly make him actually deal with his issues. And she’s a great friend in general, so she gets some brownie points for that.

“I’m here for you,” Niki says. “Alright?”

“Okay.”

They both sit in silence, with their hot chocolates, it’s a comfortable silence. It normally is with Niki.

“Wait— where’s our boy?”

“Floof?” Niki asks. “Oh, Dream is babysitting.”

“Why is Dream babysitting our dog?”

“Because Dream likes our dog.”

Techno puts his mug down, “But Dream can barely be trusted with himself, let alone my favourite dog in the world.”

“We can trust Dream with Floof.”

“That’s like trusting Tommy with Floof,” Techno argues.

“I’d trust Tommy with Floof.”

Techno just stares at her.

“You’re kidding?”

“He’s a good kid!”

“That doesn’t mean you should trust him with the light of our lives, Floof Floofikins.”

“That is not his name.”

“Is now,” Techno grins, leaning back in his chair.

Niki looks like she’s about to make some new stages of grief, including but not limited to: rage, more rage, hitting Techno with a chair, and punching him in the nose. Which... if Niki punched him in the nose there’s probably a good reason, so he would forgive it.

“Can I have Floof tonight?” Techno asks.

Niki opens her mouth, but then must see something on Techno’s face or realise something in his tone, because she nods her head. “Yeah, he misses you anyway.”

Techno snorts, “Well I miss him too.”

“He likes me more though—”

“That’s blatantly not true.”

“Hmmm...” Niki hums. “I think it is.”

“It’s just not.”

“I’m Floof’s favourite,” she grins. “And you can not change my mind about this.”

Techno scowls, crossing his arms and sinking down in his chair, not too dissimilar to the way a child would. “I like Floof more than you.”

“Well I like Floof more than you, so it’s alright.”

“Glad we could agree on that.”

Another moment of silence.

“Is Floof like at the tower though, do I need to pick him up? How does this work?”

“Well he’s not gonna just let Floof loose until he finds you.”

“I mean... he *might*. ”

Niki gives a big smile, and suddenly Techno knows she’s about to commit several acts of violence. “Not if Dream would like to... y’know, be alive.”

“You terrify me, genuinely.”

“Good!”

They fall into an easy silence as they finish off the last of their hot chocolates. Techno's tongue is so burnt that he can't taste the hot chocolate anymore, but it was totally worth it.

Techno sighs. "I'm gonna tell them what's going on with me."

"Okay," Niki says, "I will be here, if you need me, for anything. Alright? If anything goes slightly wrong, if you get overwhelmed. If *anything* happens and you need me there, I will be there. Okay?"

"Okay."

Niki stands up, and Techno does too.

She gives him a quick hug, and Techno hugs her back.

"You're a good friend."

"As are you, Tech," she says with a smile. "Again, if you need *anything*, call me, I will be there."

"Okay."

Niki goes back inside the bakery, holding both of their hot chocolate mugs and Techno stands there for a moment.

Okay. He can do this.

First he has to tell them what the fuck is going on.

Then he can deal with... basically anything else.

He takes a deep breath, before starting to head off towards the hospital. He shoves his hands into his pockets.

He gets back to the hospital quietly.

The walk is quiet and he doesn't say much, he doesn't think about much as he walks the relatively short walk from the bakery to the tower. He kicks a stone, and he sees a really cute dog.

It's a golden retriever puppy, who looks like it is dragging the brunette who's walking them almost across the ground as the puppy is clearly too excited to function as they're heading towards the nearby park.

Cute dog, ten outta ten would recommend seeing that dog again.

Otherwise very little happens, he gets to the hospital without much fanfare.

The hospital is the one that Tommy ends up in frighteningly often, and Techno feels like he knows this place way too well.

With a sigh, Techno starts towards the elevator.

Some kid recognises him, he can see it in their eyes. The kid looks at him with wide eyes, pulling on their mum's sleeve and tugging. The mum ignores them, before sighing exasperatedly and looking around.

Techno and the parent make eye contact.

He gives a small wave, and the kid beams.

Stepping into the elevator almost feels like relief. He takes a deep breath and shakes out his hands. Okay. He can do this, he has this in the bag. *'Hey Wil, yeah so basically y'know that kid you love so much? Yeah he's kinda sorta maybe the reason I will have chronic pain for the rest of my life.'*

Yeah... it'll be easy.

Yeah. Cool.

The elevator doors open and Techno walks out.

He can hear the laughter before he even approaches the door, and that's enough to make him falter in his step. He pauses next to the door for a moment.

"Do the accent," Tommy says with a huge grin.

"I'm not doing the accent that's offensive."

"Do the accent, do the accent—" Tommy says.

"I'm not doing a Logstedchire accent," Wilbur groans, "You'll record it and get me cancelled on Twitter or something."

A moment of silence and Techno leans his head against the wall, he doesn't walk into the room. Not yet, he just... needs a moment. He's not sure what he needs at that moment. Maybe to collect himself before facing everyone with a smile?

“I’m not gonna cancel you,” Tommy groans. “Come on man, do the accent.”

“No you’re gonna cancel me—”

He can’t tell them. Not now. Maybe later, but not today.

“I’m not gonna cancel you,” Tommy groans.

Wilbur sighs, “‘ello my name is Tommy.”

Tommy cackles, and Techno listens to it through the wall. He sounds happy.

Not now.

He doesn't need to throw this on Tommy, the fact he's going to be in pain a lot. The fact that Tommy will think he's the sole and only reason and try to carry the weight of the world.

Techno pushes himself up off the wall and walks in. He’s met with several pairs of worried eyes. Phil isn’t here, but Purpled, Wilbur and Ranboo are. They have a collection of chairs that Purpled and Ranboo are in, while Wilbur’s sitting on the end of the bed without a fucking care in the world.

Grabbing one of the chairs, Techno pulls it away from the group of them and sits down on it wordlessly.

“Are you okay?” Tommy asks.

“Fine.”

Ranboo's the only one with enough sense to look back at Tommy. "I was recording that," he says with a cheeky smile.

Tommy throws his head back and starts laughing.

Techno crosses his arms and looks at the wall. Everything's fine— really, it's fine he needs to not worry about it.

Standing up, Purpled and Wilbur swap seats and Wilbur drags his chair a little bit closer to Techno.

Wilbur sits down next to Techno.

Techno finds himself shuffling his chair away.

He's not sure why.

Wilbur glances at him, obviously trying to catch his eyes so that Wilbur can get... something out of him, or ask him about what exactly is wrong.

Do anything, speak to him with kindness, try to be comforting over whatever might be happening. Generally just being a good brother.

Techno doesn't look back at him.

Chapter End Notes

Also I have no clue who made this meme, but thank you whoever it was <33, lmk if that was you and I will change this!



Chapter Summary:

- Techno fumbles his ways through excuses as to wtf happens for about 4000 words and teaches his young disciples about how to fight the police (Purpled is a plan.)
- Girlboss Techno goes to find Redding Street, which he does and then gets in because of Bad
- Things do like okayyy from there, meets up with some old friends, generally lives his best life. Apart from when Techno finds out that his old besties (TapL and Fruit) kinda organised the Gala attack. (HE DOESN'T TAKE IT VERY WELL I'LL LEVEL WITH YOU.)
- he talks about WTF happened in the last chapter and Bad is like "I THINK YA BOY CAN MANIPULATE MEMORIES?" Bad is not impressed, so basically Bad info dumps about hybrids and how the fuck they work and Techno finds out being a blue hybrid means chronic pain! Then he goes "OH SHIT THEY'RE GONNA BLAME TOMMY FOR THIS" /li>
- Then Techno has a whole sad boy arc and gets back and brushes off Wilbur in a scene that MADE ME TEAR UP BECAUSE AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA AND TWINS DUO Y'KNOW

Various Artings: (SORRY IF I DIDN'T INCLUDE YOU, I APPRECIATE YOU ALL SO MUCH ALL OF UR ART IS SO PRETTY, IT'S JUST BEEN A MONTH AND THERE'S A LOT OF STUFF)

First up we have this [AMAZING ANIMATIC](#) BY ROZY OMG GO WATCH IT RN

[Tina!Niki](#) (my beloved), and this [ANGSTY AS FUCK PIECE](#) (warning for blood) by Pistol

[OUR BOY, WITH A LADYBUG](#)

(warning for bugs) which fun-fact, is tina!tommy's favourite animal, done by the lovely Kim

Keisha, my beloved [drew a comic from a More Acts chapter](#) (warning for blood and implied abuse)

V drew [Theseus chillin' on a wall](#)

THIS [REALLY CUTE DRAWING OF TINA!TOMMY](#) by bootytickler69

Art from [last chapter](#) by Meow (warning for blood!)

Rozy also did [art from last chapter](#)

[TOMMY AT THE GALA BY CANDYH](#)

ALSO THIS [FUCKING HILARIOUS COMIC](#) BY PROBLEMSOLVED

ALSO HAVE [THIS TIKTOK](#) AND [THIS ONE](#) BECAUSE THEY'RE BOTH VERY FUNNY AND I'M RUNNING OUTTA CHARACTER SPACE

Also due to some mental and physical health reasons I'm having a bit of a break from TINAAOS, I don't know when the next update will be, might be a week, might be a couple of months

In Which Many Things Happen and Titles Are Hard

Chapter Summary

“Tommy,” Techno says, there’s a warning in his tone but Tommy isn’t really one to take warnings from anyone and this will not be the first time he takes a warning from a man. “Please do not guilt Wilbur into getting you an army of flippable octopi.”

“I think I will,” Tommy says, “Then the army and I will cross the furthest corners of the globe in order to win our wars. I can already see it, me as the military commander, commanding all of my little soldiers.”

or. i got carried away with fluff and kinda went "OH SHIT WAIT WE HAVE SOME PLOT WE NEED TO DO!"

so it's basically fluff with tommy vaguely traumatising himself like a tiny little bit...

aka: a filler chapter that somehow got to be like 27k words

Chapter Notes

Hi guys! It's been a little while! But I'm glad to be back and hopefully I can get chapter 33 out soonish because my goal is to have two longish chapters with lots of content to keep y'all fed for a while.

I think most of you have read my update chapter but if you haven't the lowdown is that I changed tina!techno's plotline and went back to edit it, all you gotta know now is basically:

- the blue 'side effects' give him chronic pain, so like his back hurts or his legs hurt a lot
- he's stressed about letting Phil & Wilbur know because they'll blame Theseus
- he doesn't wanna tell Tommy cause he'll blame himself.

But anyway onto the new chapter! This one was super fun to write and I actually wrote most of it in the middle of my exam period which was surprisingly fun, and I did lots of writing sprints and lots of character interactions I did not need. But I had an amazing time writing it, so who cares about the dumb things like "plot" and "wasting words"

Anyway I hope you all enjoy, I'm glad to be back (probably in a smaller capacity due to school being a BITCH) but i am here and I am ready to rumble!

Warnings: gun mentions, hospitals and some medical talk (but not much), there is some memory fuckery that goes on, but we don't see that through the POV, there's a couple of

food mentions (ie. Ranboo & cinnamon rolls & baked bean pasta bake)

As always there is a summary at the end! And I would recommend reading last chapter's summary so you can remind yourself on like... TINAAOS lore because it has been a HOT SECOND

anyway love you bye <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Y'know... sometimes Tommy worries about the people around him. They worry about him too, as much as Tommy hates it. Ranboo worries about him while he's in hospital, Wilbur worries even more than Ranboo and Tubbo— well Tubbo isn't there, so he's not worrying which is always good.

Hospital is like... fine, the food's shit. The doctor wants to watch over him for another night, and there's something knowing in their eyes as they say that. Tommy nods slowly before eating his pudding cup anyway— if anything is good about hospital food, it's this. They're just the best pudding he's ever had.

Sometimes when he was little he'd be upset about the hospital due to— probably justified reasons, and then he'd have a pudding cup from there and boom! Everything was okay. So now he's eating a pudding cup while Phil and Wilbur talk about legal things and Tommy tunes them out because... ew fuck that.

Techno.

Techno's been fun, because he's been.

Weird.

Techno's been really fucking weird, is the only words that Tommy has for it. He's standing there all... angsty. He's just sitting in the corner looking really upset about the entire thing, Tommy's not sure *what* exactly happened wherever he went but he doesn't seem happy about it.

He's also been pulling faces more, like he's in actual pain. Tommy doesn't *think* his leg is bothering him but he's not sure.

"Tech?" Tommy asks.

Techno looks up from his phone, "Yeah, kid?"

"Are you alright?"

Wilbur and Phil aren't in the room and Tommy and Techno are both pretending to not be able to hear him. Ranboo's gone back to school, Purpled's at work and Techno should probably be at work but he isn't.

It's just them.

Tommy puts down the empty pudding cup and looks at Techno. "What's up?"

"They surely can't arrest him," he hears Wilbur say through the wall. *"There's no evidence."*

Tuning out Wilbur and Phil is *really* quite a feat considering neither of them speak like they need to hide anything about themselves. Which Tommy thinks is some fuckin' bullshit if he's ever heard it.

Techno opens his mouth and then closes it. "Nothin'."

"Aren't you rostered on for work?"

Techno nods.

“So you should be at work.”

“I would rather eat my own hoodie than go back to work. I am not suffering under capitalism today,” Techno says, he draws his knees up to his chest and looks at Tommy.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” Tommy asks slowly, “You’ve... been acting odd.”

Techno sighs, leaning back in his chair slightly and pinching the bridge of his nose. “I— I’m good, Tommy, please don’t worry about me, my leg just hurts.”

Tommy tilts his head at Techno, “I thought you said you were getting a new one.”

“I am getting a new one,” Techno deadpans, “I just don’t have it *now* .”

“Well, simply tell Sam to get better.”

Techno grins at that. “Nah,” Techno says with a laugh. “Don’t be worried about me. When you should be worried about you.”

“Huh?”

“I mean... your hair, Tommy,” Techno says, and he sounds a suspicious amount like Wilbur right now, he has the same grin and everything. “It’s just a mess, it looks like... I could clean the ground with it.”

Tommy raises an eyebrow, “And how the fuck would you do that?”

Techno moves and Tommy just sighs.

Hanging upside down is something Tommy is rather familiar with.

He sighs.

He hangs upside down, sighing as Techno holds him by the ankles.

“Techno!” Tommy yells, his cries get promptly ignored as his hair reaches the ground.

Techno decides that Tommy’s hair is the perfect mop and starts swinging him slightly, his hair brushing against the ground as he laughs.

“Tech— Techno!” Tommy says through wheezing breaths, “Put me down!” He tries to kick his legs to little avail as his hair hangs in his face and he just laughs, laughs for the sake of it and laughs because he can.

“I need a mop!” Techno says, and sure enough is using Tommy’s hair as a mop.

“Put me down!” Tommy shrieks with laughter.

He crashes against the ground a moment later, with a yelp and then a certain fury in his eyes as he looks at Techno. His hand hurts slightly from landing on it, but other than that he’s okay.

“Techno.”

“Thomas.” Techno’s tone matches his own, polite and respectful.

“I am... going to... cancel you.”

Techno looks him dead in the eyes, “Do it,” he says. “Right now. You fuckin’ won’t.”

Well shit, the bluff has been called and now Tommy is stuck... not really knowing what the fuck to do, because what like... *can* he do, he can throw away his job and prove Techno wrong. Or he keeps his very well-paying, very nice job and accepts that *this time* Techno is right.

He’s not happy about it, but he crosses his arms and scowls.

“You look like a golden retriever,” Techno muses, looking down at Tommy.

To be fair, Tommy does look a bit like a child. Sitting on the ground with his arms crossed as he scowls at everything, it’s not a completely *unjust* statement, but it makes Tommy scowl a bit harder (probably not disproving Techno’s point though— is it?)

“Are you gonna get up?”

“No.”

“At all?”

“Nope.”

“So you’ll rot there?”

“I will do what I must, Technoblade.”

“Okay, Thomas Underscore,” Techno’s voice is both a mixture of fondness and complete annoyance, which to be fair is an accurate descriptor of their relationship.

Tommy eventually swallows his pride and gets up off the floor.

He flops face-first onto the bed and buries his head into the pillow.

For a moment Techno doesn't say anything.

"Hey... Toms?"

Tommy turns his head so he's still laying on the pillow but looking at Techno with wide and concerned eyes as he does so. "Yeah?" He says back, his voice is softer than it normally is and they've both dropped their tones. "You alright?"

"Lots of things aren't your fault," Techno says, and there's a steely, sure look in his eyes. "Things that happened to you— those aren't your fault, you are not a bad person because of those things. You are a survivor, and you are stronger than you'll probably ever know. And I'm proud of you."

"Are you—" Tommy tries to pick his words carefully, but he's never been amazing at that, and probably never will be. "Are you *sure* you're not feeling sick?"

"I'm sure," Techno combines a little nod with his words, as if to solidify them, they work and Tommy feels... more comforted, not completely, but more.

With a tilt of his head, Tommy keeps his eyes on Techno, when eventually he breaks into a wide smile. "You're very wise, Technoblade," Tommy eventually decides to say with a grin.

"Oh?" Techno says tiredly, he yawns before slumping down in his chair slightly.

Tommy thinks that they can not be having that in this society, especially when there's a perfectly good bed that they totally can both fit on.

"C'm'ere," Tommy says.

He can feel his energy draining, just slowly, but his eyes feel heavier and his breaths feel deeper. He might not fall asleep, but he's pretty fucking close and that is something he supposes he'll need to cope with later.

Techno gives him a look, before hobbling over to the hospital bed.

Without a word Tommy lifts up the cover and gets under the cover. Both of them are half hanging off the side of the bed, it's not practical at all and they're both laughing too hard to get anything *close* to sleep.

But it's nice... it's nice to be there with Techno, to laugh at the panic in his eyes as he almost falls off the bed and to smile for... well— no reason, it's just nice.

Tommy feels familiar waves of comfort wash over him, as they do when he's with Techno. Techno is just... a calming person, that's something that Tommy can't help but love and appreciate about him.

He knows what to say— sometimes. And he knows what Tommy needs, like right now Tommy needs sleep.

But... Techno is not perfect.

That is why when Tommy is in the weird state between awakeness and sleep.

A pillow hits him on the side of the head.

Tommy can't be bothered to try and do anything about it, half asleep he sits up, he's aware his hair must be in just about every direction known to man and he stares at Techno with tired eyes.

Tommy's tired mind has a brilliant plan, a truly amazing plan that he is very much a fan of and now he's gonna run with it because he's tired and not having things like... brain cells, or thoughts— he's not that rich.

He throws an arm over Techno, like that will stop Techno from attacking him with a pillow. "Shhh..." Tommy whispers, "Sleep."

Techno snorts slightly, "I'm not going to sleep—"

Tommy slaps his hand over Techno's mouth, "Sleep," he says again.

Techno seems to get the memo.

They're both out in about five minutes, cramped on this hospital bed, with Tommy having one arm thrown over Techno to stop him from trying to attack him while he tries to get some (much needed) rest.

What wakes Tommy up is laughing.

It's the fond sorta laughter.

"Not a word," that's Techno's voice. But Techno is supposed to be fast asleep and doing things like sleeping! Instead he's awake and talking and Tommy can not be having that. "Wilbur I swear to—"

“Wimblur,” Tommy murmurs, he slowly opens his eyes.

He is sure enough, met face to face with the aforementioned Wimblur and he screws up his nose. Piercing green eyes stare at him and Tommy stares back at Wilbur, a bored expression on his face.

“Hello,” Wilbur says.

“Hello,” Tommy responds, “Why did you wake me up?”

“Because.”

“I hate you,” Tommy says, he rolls over, before realising Techno is in his way and slowly, but surely starts pushing him off the bed. It’s a slow process, but it’s a good process.

Techno doesn’t realise what Tommy’s doing until he’s about halfway through falling, then he yelps and hits the ground with a thump. Muttering a couple of chosen swear words as Tommy buries his head into his pillow again.

“I just... got kicked off the bed,” Techno mumbles, “Wilbur this child is a tyrant.”

Tommy peers out of the cocoon he’s recently put himself in and he glares at Techno with as much fury as he can muster. “You are an evil man.”

“Oh?” Techno says, dragging himself off the ground and sitting in one of the chairs, “And why is that, kid?”

Tommy shrugs, before deciding he should at least sit up and *pretend* to be doing human things, because that is... the responsible thing to be doing.

With way more effort than he'd like to admit, he frees himself from the blanket cocoon and sits up, grabbing the hospital remote control thingy that they have and pressing it until he's sitting upright almost perfectly.

He looks at Wilbur, then at Techno, they're the only two here. Phil is... probably doing old people shit, Ranboo should be at school and so should Tubbo and Purpled is... doing Purpled shit, whatever that might be.

"I got you a gift," Wilbur says quietly, "There's an arcade machine downstairs and I was bored because you two were both napping so—"

He picks up a toy octopus from one of the chairs before placing it on the bed.

It's one of those flippable ones that have a happy expression on one side and a sad expression on the other. It's a red and blue one, with red being the happy side and blue being on the sad side.

Tommy decides this is his new favourite thing.

"I'm not a baby," he says instead.

Wilbur shrugs, before sitting back down in his seat. "His name is Otto."

"I love him," Tommy says, looking at the little octopus sitting on his bed and smiling at it, "How many goes did this take to get?"

"I—" Wilbur pauses for a moment. "Technically... I may have gotten inside of the machine, picked up the toy, put it down the... thingy and then phased out of the machine."

"Wilbur what the fuck—" Techno starts.

“ *You only got one?* ” Tommy shrieks, “You have access to the entire arcade machine and you just get one octopus? We need an army, Wilbur, we need an army.”

Techno sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose with an ever greater sigh as he shakes his head slightly. He seems... a bit tired about the whole thing, but also there's a certain fondness in his eyes that he can't shake no matter how much he tries to hide it.

This just eggs on Tommy to be a fucking menace for the ages, he grins widely and looks at Wilbur, giving his best pleading look. It is probably not overly effective if he is being completely honest, but it's very funny.

Wilbur looks at Tommy. “I am not stealing cheap toys from a hospital vending machine.”

“But Wilbur,” Tommy mumbles, “I'm very injured— and only one thing will make me feel better... and it's a mountain of flippable octopi.”

Wilbur just sighs. “No—”

“Please?”

“No.”

“But Wilbur!”

“No.”

“Wilbur, please.”

“No,” Wilbur says again, his resolve is breaking a little and Tommy can see it in his eyes.

This just makes Tommy grin a little wider and look at Wilbur, he tries to make his face as sad as possible and Techno scoffs.

“This can not be working,” Techno deadpans, collapsing into one of the chairs and shaking his head at the pair of them. “Wilbur— do not let the gremlin child get to you, he is simply lying and deceiving you. Do not let it work.”

Wilbur nods slowly, still keeping eye contact with Tommy. Tommy doesn’t do anything but smile a bit bright.

“I do feel rather awful, Wilbur.”

“Tommy,” Techno says, there’s a warning in his tone but Tommy isn’t really one to take warnings from anyone and this will not be the first time he takes a warning from a *man* . “Please do not guilt Wilbur into getting you an army of flippable octopi.”

“I think I will,” Tommy says, “Then the army and I will cross the furtherest corners of the globe in order to win our wars. I can already see it, me as the military commander, commanding all of my little soldiers.”

“Furtherest?” Techno repeats.

“Did I fuckin’ stutter, bitch?”

“Suppose not,” Techno says, he grabs his phone.

Tommy counts that as quite a big win for the Thomas Underscore community. Techno has given up trying to stop Tommy’s persuasion and that means that Wilbur will not have anyone stopping Tommy from convincing him, as Wilbur’s will is about as weak as Ranboo’s.

“Wil—”

“Fine!” Wilbur says, throwing both his arms up, “Fine. Fine. You need to come with me.”

Techno raises an eyebrow and looks up from his phone. “He’s supposed to be monitored.”

“Yeah...” Wilbur says, “Uh— I did a first aid class once? I’m basically a nurse—”

“That is just not remotely true,” Techno does not seem overly impressed with the entire situation. He looks at Tommy with what might perhaps be the most deadpan expression that Tommy has ever seen in his life. “If you pass out I am going to murder you, alright?”

“Alright...” Tommy mutters.

Now he wants to pass out just to fucking spite Techno, because he’s just... that silly and goofy and built different.

He throws off the blankets and stands next to Wil, grinning at him.

Wilbur sighs.

“Come on,” he mutters.

Tommy is more than on board with this plan and so he follows after Wilbur.

Wilbur walks with the confidence of a man who isn’t about to go steal a bunch of arcade toys for a teenager. Which is frankly kind of amazing when Tommy thinks about it. He holds himself... differently.

Tommy's never noticed this, the way that Wilbur is holding himself at the moment. His back is straighter than usual, and Tommy walks beside him, trying to keep up because Wilbur is walking rather fast.

"You're acting weird."

"Huh?"

"Your back's all like... straight and shit."

Wilbur pauses for a moment, "Just muscle spasms, to make them hurt less I stand like a weirdo."

"Why?"

"Why?"

"Do you have back spasms?"

"Uh..." Wilbur glances at Tommy, "I've been thrown into way too many buildings. All that throwing starts doing damage over the years."

"But—"

"It's fine, Tommy," Wilbur says, "I've been a hero for... too long, I'm lucky I haven't gotten off with worse."

"Oh."

“Yeah—”

They stop in front of an elevator, and Wilbur and Tommy glance at each other. They file into the elevator.

Tommy decides to stand with his back to the door.

“Why?” Wilbur sounds... a little less than mortified if Tommy is being completely honest.
“Why the fuck would you even—”

“I like the wall,” Tommy responds with ease, the smile slowly creeping over his face seeps into his tone and Wilbur glares at the door of the elevator as it starts to whirl and buzz around them.

Wilbur stays quiet, quietly seething about... Tommy facing the wall rather than the door, the angsty motherfucker is well... that, an angsty motherfucker.

Eventually the doors open and Tommy walks out with the confidence of a man who has just... done something confident? He’s not really great with metaphors but he’s trying. Maybe a man who’s eaten a burrito the wrong way but acts like it’s the right way?

Wilbur is largely silent as they walk through the hospital.

Tommy hears a shout from a child, and he can’t help the way that his head whips over to where the noise came from and his heart jumps in his throat.

Wilbur notes his change in behaviour and he also looks over to where Tommy is looking.

“Mum!” The kid yells, they’re down the end of one of the hallways branching off from the main one they’re walking down. “Look I got a sticker!”

Tommy’s heart is still in his throat, he can hear it beating and the terror is still flooding his veins as he looks at the kid who is shouting out of joy— not fear, not heart— the kid has a sticker and they’re happy about that.

Wilbur grabs his arm, and that makes Tommy jump.

“Toms? You alright?” Wilbur asks slowly, it has the right amount of care for Tommy’s heart to calm down a little.

“Yeah,” Tommy chokes out. “I’m good— just— yeah, I’m good.”

Wilbur raises an eyebrow, he looks at the kid and their parent down the end of the hallway and then back at Tommy. “Do you want to chat to them?”

“W—what?”

“To make sure the kid’s alright,” Wilbur does not have a moment of hesitation and Tommy loves him for it. “I think they are... but it’s good to make sure y’know?”

Tommy nods, and follows after Wilbur wordlessly.

Wilbur gives a polite smile at the mother as they approach and the kid stops.

She looks up at Wilbur and her mouth falls open. “Spectre?” She shrieks.

Wilbur suddenly looks about a thousand times more terrified, that this little red head is going to end his bloodline, kill his family, trample his crops and burn down his village. Wilbur

manages a nod. “Yeah...”

“Why’d you kick Theseus off a roof?” The little girl says, she tilts her head then looks at Tommy. “My Mummy said that— it’s because—”

The mother laughs nervously before picking up her daughter and giving an awkward smile, “I am so sorry Mister Soot.”

“No issue,” Wilbur says and he somehow sounds like he actually means that, and Tommy honestly has no clue if he’s acting or not. “Uh my—” he looks at Tommy, “Employee? We were just worried, we heard yelling and it’s always better to check that everything’s alright.”

The woman nods, giving a smile, “Well— thank you for that, it’s always better to check.”

The girl smiles at Tommy, she gives a beaming smile and Tommy can’t help but give a small smile back.

“Pst,” the girl whispers, as if Wilbur or her mum can’t hear them right now. “You seem scared, but that’s okay! Mummy says that you’re allowed to be scared,” she reaches into her pocket.

It’s a rock.

Bit underwhelming but okay.

“The rock will keep you safe!” She whispers, “Because people are very scary, but the rock will keep you safe from all the meanies.”

She holds out the rock in a fist, and Tommy reaches out his outstretched palm. The rock is dropped into his palm and the little girl nods to herself.

“There you go!” She says, “Hospitals aren’t as scary when you have a rock.”

“Thank you,” Tommy replies, a smile grows over his face and he seems rather content with himself. “You’re a pretty smart kid.”

“Thanks!” She announces, “I get it from Mum!”

Her mum laughs fondly, “Well, I hope that Olivia’s stone could help with your nerves—” she pauses waiting for a name to fill in the blank.

“Tommy,” Wilbur says.

“Tommy,” she finishes. “But I have a taxi to try and catch so I wish you good luck.”

Tommy nods his head and the pair of them walk off.

Wilbur pats his shoulder, “See, kid, everything’s alright.”

“Yeah,” Tommy nods, he takes a deep breath and holds the stone a little tighter in his hand. It’s partially covered in dirt that gets on his hand, but it’s so... endearingly sweet that Tommy can not help but smile at it.

He looks at Wilbur, and finds himself smiling rather widely, this one almost hurts his face.

“Thank you, Wil.”

“No problem, Tommy,” Wilbur says, “Now let’s go wreck some children’s days.”

“Fuck yeah!”

The claw machine is at the end of a seemingly random hallway, it's not even in the children's ward, but there's like... no one around at all. Which is something that Tommy is more than okay with.

Wilbur glances around nervously before approaching the machine.

“So...” Tommy says, “How are we gonna do this?”

Wilbur just gives him a look. “I'm gonna phase through.”

“Oh yeah.”

Wilbur shakes out his hands, before running at the machine.

Tommy expects for Wilbur to run straight through it.

Wilbur instead whacks his head on the glass and stumbles back, holding the side of his head.
“Fuckin' ow.”

“Well that was underwhelming.”

“Fuck off,” Wilbur says, “Fuckin' muscle spasm threw me off, leave me alone.”

Tommy does not think he will be doing that.

Wilbur approaches the machine slower this time, and just reaches his arm straight through the plastic like it's nothing. Which to Wilbur... it probably isn't, hence the whole Spectre situation he has going on.

"Can't you just reach through and pick out the toys?" Tommy asks, he pushes his face onto the plastic and looks through as Wilbur steps into the machine.

"I mean I could," Wilbur says as he steps up and the toys move slightly as he goes solid again. "But trying to turn objects incorporeal is a lot of effort."

"Clothes?"

"I'm so used to that I don't think about it," Wilbur picks up a flippable octopus and puts it through the collection thingy, before picking up another one with ease. "Like... I could, or I could just do this which is way easier."

"Can you go invisible?"

Wilbur picks up another octopus, this one is pink and purple, and Tommy decides he'll give that one to Purpled.

"Nah, not really— kinda, but not really," Wilbur explains. "I can like... be harder to see, but I can't go invisible."

"Can you phase through the floor?"

"Yup. That's stressful, happened a lot when I was younger," he picks up an orange and yellow octopus and throws it down into the collection area. "Now the main key is to like... leave the bottoms of my feet... solid and then turn those incorporeal if I need to jump through something."

“How do you get outta being stuck in the floor?”

“Once they cut out a whole section of the tower for me,” Wilbur laughs at that. “I was halfway through the floor, so you could just see my legs hanging. They took out a chunk of the floor.”

“Was the floor not stuck inside of you.”

“Nah... if I stop being a ghost boy inside of like a wall or something, my body will like... push the excess stuff away?” He picks up another octopus and throws it into the chute. This one is just a regular green one but it’s very cute.

Tommy starts piling up his collecting of flippable octopi in his arms and hugs them close to his chest. He currently only has three out of the ten he wants (not including Otto of course.)

Something that would be really funny was if someone saw Spectre... one of the highest ranked heroes in the country in an arcade machine picking out very particular toys for a teenager who is legally an adult.

Tommy snorts at the entire thing, before grabbing his phone and snapping a quick photo of Wilbur in the arcade machine.

He’ll tweet about that later.

Wilbur picks up an armful of them, before dumping them all unceremoniously and Tommy scrambles to get them all of the collection bit.

“So Wil— now I have my army—”

“Tommy?”

Wilbur does a peace sign and sinks through the wall behind the arcade machine.

Tommy turns around, his arms filled with the flippable octopi he loves so much, he opens his mouth and closes it again.

Standing in front of him is Dream, who has a bunch of flowers.

“Are those for George?” Tommy asks, peering over his pile of stuffed octopi.

“Huh?”

Tommy has spent way too much time on Twitter.

“Why do you have flowers Dream, you trying to woo someone?”

Dream snorts, shaking his head. “Absolutely not, I was just... visiting someone, then I was gonna come and visit you, The Tower has been objectively shittier without you there,” Dream adjusts his mask so it’s more over his nose as well.

“Who are you visiting?”

“Family friend...” Dream says slowly, like the words are somehow dangerous. “She’s a bit younger than you.”

Eventually Dream seems to realise that Tommy has a million fucking octopi in his arms and he’s holding them. Dream looks over his shoulder towards the claw machine behind them.

“Why do you... have... so many claw machine octopi?”

“I... I’m just really good at claw machines?” Tommy tilts his head. “And I have a lot of money?”

“Neither of those things are true. Not even slightly,” Dream says.

Wilbur appears through a wall behind Dream, one of the sidewalls of the hallway.

He presses his finger to his lips and walks behind Dream, half intangible as he moves closer and closer.

“Well hospitals are rather borin’ y’know?” Tommy says carefully, trying to suppress his laughter.

Wilbur stands right behind Dream, before leaning so his head is almost leaning on Dream’s shoulder.

“Run,” Wilbur whispers.

Tommy has truthfully never seen a man jump higher than he does at that moment. Dream jumps and stumbles back, putting an arm in front of Tommy to protect him from the threat that isn’t really there.

Dream looks at Wilbur, who is grinning widely.

Then Dream snatches an octopi from Tommy and throws it at Wilbur.

It phases right through him.

Dream sputters a bit, before grabbing his flowers like they're a sword. "Stop being a ghost, come here right now."

Wilbur just smiles, drifting back towards the wall.

He gives a two finger salute, before disappearing through the wall again.

Dream looks at Tommy, seeming a bit more tired than before. "Is that how you got all of those?"

"Yup!" Tommy says with a smile, "That is exactly how I got all of those. Wilbur got inside the machine."

"Do you have a photo?"

"Yeah..."

Dream raises an eyebrow, "If you give me that photo I will not tell anyone that you stole children's toys from a hospital."

"Okay when you say it like that it sounds pretty bad—"

"*Pretty?*" Dream laughs, "It is *very* bad."

"Uh... in my defence... uh... yeah."

Dream rolls his eyes and shakes his head.

“So,” Tommy looks at the now incriminating octopi. “Wilbur really left me here by myself to suffer.”

“Yup,” Dream says.

“So... come here often?” Tommy tries, he doesn’t do a very good job at it, but he thinks he does a good enough job that he gets a pass *at least* .

Dream sighs, “Yeah actually.”

“The Logstedchire hospital?”

Dream pauses, looking at Tommy for a long moment. “Kid. I grew up here.”

“Huh?” Tommy shrieks. “You’re from Logstedchire?”

“Well— no, we lived in Middle for a while and then Pa died so we moved out here, hence the lack of accent.”

Tommy just stares at Dream, “How have you not used that... for like marketing or something, anything, really? You’re literally the perfect underdog story and you really just said... ‘no’ marketing—”

“I am not marketing my life story in order to make people like me more, Tommy,” Dream says, “Anyway where’s your room? I’ll drop these off later.”

“Okay!” Tommy says happily, “Why’s your family friend here?”

“Uh... just is,” Dream says.

Cool, Dream doesn't want to talk about that, and that's completely fair. Tommy nods and starts walking back towards the elevator.

Half way through their walk back, Wilbur phases through the wall.

His hair is significantly messier than last time Tommy saw Wilbur.

"I—" Wilbur wheezes, holding his side. "Got punched," he wheezes with laughter in a way that's not too unlike Dream. "I fuckin', thought the room was empty. But it was *not*." Wilbur laughs a bit harder before holding the side of his cheek.

Dream glares at Wilbur, there's no real malice behind it, just a fond sort of hatred. Wilbur just grins widely and swings an arm around Dream's shoulders as they keep walking. "So, Dream, who are the flowers for? Is George in hospital—"

"Why does everyone keep asking that— no, my family friend is in the hospital."

Something slightly worried flashes across Wilbur's face and he glances at Tommy. "Again?" Wilbur says.

"Again," Dream says, his tone is... it's odd to describe. It's a bit clipped, but also has emotion through every letter of just that word. It's almost chilling the tone and the look in Dream's eyes combined. "She's alright though," Dream says easily, "Just lack of sleep and stuff, y'know how it is Wil."

"That I do my friend, that I do," Wilbur unwinds his arm from around Dream's shoulders as they approach the elevator and step in.

Tommy doesn't face the wall this time, and instead stands in the elevator like a normal person because he's not a fucking menace.

He picks up one of the octopi that Wilbur stole for him. It's a cute little boy, and also a double up of Otto, and Tommy can not be having double ups of his beloved boy Otto the Octopus. He looks at Dream.

Then he manages to shift them all, so Tommy can reach up and grab the Otto wanna-be.

"Give this to her," Tommy says, "The octopus."

Dream hesitates for a moment.

Tommy holds it out. "C'mon," he says easily. "Don't be like that, I already have another one of him. Otto, my best boy, you simply can not replace someone as cool as him, so I don't see why you'd even bother."

Dream takes the octopus plushie and tucks it under his arm with the flowers.

"You should donate here," Tommy says, he doesn't look away from the elevator doors as it whirls around them and they move up. "There's a couple of charities that get like... toys for the kids."

Dream smiles, Tommy doesn't see his mouth move but he sees the corners of his eyes tighten a little and his eyes brighten a smidgen.

"That's a good idea," Wilbur says.

Tommy looks over at Wilbur for a moment.

Dream also seems shocked by this development because he also turns to look at Wilbur with wider eyes. "Did you just— *agree* with *Tommy*. "

“Yeah?” Wilbur says, “Is that... that rare of a thing?”

“I mean...” Dream trails off, “Whenever there’s anything to do with money you get super defensive.”

“Do I?” Wilbur asks, there’s no... attack directed in his voice, it’s just... genuine curiosity and concern and that makes Tommy smile a little, he turns his head away because he is grinning way too widely for anyone’s business.

Dream shrugs, “Kinda.”

“Oh,” Wilbur says slowly, “I will— work on that then.”

Tommy doesn’t even try to hide his smile.

The elevator doors open and they step out almost in unison, this leads to an awkward shuffle as they all try to get out of the door at the same time, something that is just... objectively hilarious.

Eventually they all get out in one piece, with minimal amounts of trauma, Wilbur is laughing the entire time they walk back to Tommy’s room and Dream is also laughing about... something, Tommy doesn't really know but he’s smiling too.

They enter the hospital room, and Techno looks tired. He scans the gaggle of people that have been brought in before screwing up his face in a way that does not look overly flattering.

“You have a stray.”

“They do,” Dream says and nods his head. He places the flowers down on a chair before looking around the room.

“Is George in hospital?” Techno asks.

“Why does—” Dream screws up his face, “Why does everyone keep saying that, but no, George is not. I am seeing a family friend but then I saw Tommy with his stolen children’s toys.”

“Stop calling them that!” Tommy says, he dumps the octopi on his bed, before looking at all of them carefully.

He’s going to give one to Wilbur and one to Techno. Also one to Purpled and maybe Tubbo if he stops being a fucking wanker.

While that seems unlikely he can still dream of better times.

“I won them fair and square!” Tommy lies.

“Before or after Wilbur got in the machine?” Techno asks.

Three pairs of eyes land on him and Techno looks up from his phone, “What?”

“Snitch!” Wilbur yells.

Apparently this has offended his honour, because Wilbur manages to haul Techno out of his chair and onto his back, it does not seem comfortable for Wilbur at all. But— Wilbur’s stronger than Tommy thought if he can carry Techno with only limited struggle.

Techno just looks bored.

The corners of Dream's eyes are wrinkled so Tommy is going to assume that he is having a good time, which is always fun!

"I am going to—" Wilbur looks around. "Throw you outta the window."

"Wow... me and Theseus," Techno deadpans, "We can start a support group where we bitch about you."

Wilbur scowls, "I hate you and everything you stand for."

"Then sit."

Dream seems rather amused by this whole situation and he's now on the hospital bed. Tommy sits down next to him.

"Want some imaginary popcorn?" Dream asks.

Tommy reaches over to the imaginary bucket of popcorn and takes an imaginary handful of it before watching Wilbur and Techno again.

"You're a fucker," Wilbur says, "I hate you. Everything you stand for, it's bad, you're bad. You're evil and I hate you."

"Okay," Techno says.

Wilbur is still carrying him, and Techno looks like he is trying to make himself heavier and more annoying to carry, which honestly that's something Tommy respects on a fundamental

level.

“Fucker,” Wilbur mutters. “This is why your mum doesn’t love you.”

“At least I know my mum.”

“Ah yes, because that’s *such* a benefit to you.”

Dream and Tommy exchange a glance, Dream seems a bit more nervous than Tommy about the battle now going on in front of their eyes.

“Are they always like this?” Dream whispers, not very sneakily but Wilbur and Techno are too busy squabbling to hear.

“Basically,” Tommy stage-whispers back as Wilbur starts struggling to hold Techno up off the ground. “It’s really funny, they’re just— always at each other’s throats.”

“Cool,” Dream makes a gesture with the imaginary popcorn and Tommy takes a handful.

Prime, they’re fucking nerds.

Both of them, they’re such fucking nerds and Tommy kinda loves it.

“So,” Dream says, “I’m guessin’ you gave people a fright?”

“Not everyone,” Tommy mumbles as Wilbur starts insulting Techno’s hair.

“Oh?”

Tommy sighs, running a hand down his face. “My— best friend? Roommate? I dunno, Tubbo.”

“Is this the... same Tubbo that threw a book at your face?”

“... yeah,” Tommy murmurs as he covers his face with his hands. “It’s just like— I get it, he’s under so much stress at the moment and I can’t even imagine what he’s going through, I just know that it’s *so* shitty and...” Tommy lets himself trail off again before sighing. “I dunno, it affected me more than it probably should’ve and I feel so shitty about it.”

Dream looks worried, like... seriously worried. Tommy can’t even see the bottom half of his face over the black mask over his mouth and nose and knows that is also worried.

“Your roommate... throws a book at you, doesn’t show up to hospital when you’re injured and— didn’t you have a black eye a couple days ago?”

“Uh... kinda,” Tommy murmurs.

“When I asked you where Techno was?” Dream recounts, his eyes widening at every word. “Tommy—”

“No, no, no,” Tommy shakes his head, “No— it’s not... it’s not that.”

“It seems like that,” Dream says, it’s a bit louder than he probably should because Wilbur and Techno stop their argument to look at them. “Go back to your arguing,” Dream says.

Wilbur and Techno look at each other, before Wilbur shrugs and dissolves into another rant that Tommy can not be fucked to hear.

“Your hair looks like a triangle—”

“I’m here for you,” Dream says slowly, “I’m not any sorta Techno or Wilbur or— even Daniel, but if you need me I am here for you.”

Tommy wants to cry.

“Thanks,” Tommy says quietly, there’s a gentle smile on his face.

And the sound of Techno and Wilbur arguing becomes background noise as Dream and Tommy watch with surprisingly curious expressions.

Tommy’s release from hospital is a lot simpler than Tommy remembers it being in the past when he was small. When he was small there was this whole thing he had to do. He had to like... fill out some forms? Or his parents did, or something happened because Tommy remembers him getting released from hospital was like a whole day's event. They must be good now, so Tommy can cope with that.

He’s ready for the process to take about a million years.

Instead what happens is:

Tommy asks when he can leave.

Ponk says that today is fine.

Tommy leaves.

It is... way simpler than it was when he was a child and he is very grateful for that.

Ponk warns that Tommy can't overexert himself, and that might lead to dizziness, he gives Tommy a knowing look when he says it before continuing on with his day and general life.

Wilbur interprets the 'no overexerting himself' as the fact that Tommy is unable to walk basically anywhere.

They argue about Tommy's competence with walking and not passing out, Tommy says he'll be fine, Wilbur disagrees. They argue about that for a while until Techno looks like he's about to throw himself out the window.

Wilbur gives him a lift to his apartment.

For once he doesn't drive like a fucking mad man and he lives his best life, something that Tommy enjoys. It's a short drive even with the annoying traffic... well being annoying and shit. The way that it tends to be.

"Do you wanna drink or something?" Tommy asks, "You can hang around for a bit."

Wilbur looks... conflicted, to say the least. So he nods and gets out of the car.

Tommy feels a bit nervous leaving a fancy car on the street but then he realises that Wilbur can just buy another one if he feels like it and then he feels way less bad about it. It's quiet as he clambers up the stairs.

He stops at the mailbox grabbing several letters. Two of them are bills and one of them is addressed to Tubbo, he raises an eyebrow at that, but it does have the school logo so it's like... probably fine.

Wilbur follows after him silently judging all the stains on the walls. “What is *that* ?” Wilbur whispers.

“Don’t think about it,” Tommy says, “It’s *so* much better for you if you just... don’t question it.”

“Right...” Wilbur says quietly.

They reach the front door of Tommy’s apartment and he fumbles with the key for a bit, before hearing it unlock. He then slams his shoulder into the door to get it to swing open, and then bows.

“What the fuck—”

“Door doesn’t open unless you do that,” Tommy explains, “Supposed to be fixed like three months ago but it just— wasn’t.”

He steps into the apartment which... is surprisingly clean for once, everything is where it’s supposed to be which is a nice change from normal. He looks around at everything, the bookshelves have been fixed, there are no dishes in the sink.

There’s a couple of takeout boxes in the bin so Tommy assumes that they ate well while he was away, probably actually having some meat that wasn’t chicken.

“Looks nice,” Wilbur says, “Tidier than what I’d expect from a bunch of teenage boys.”

“Ranboo stress cleans,” Tommy explains, he dumps his bag on the kitchen counter and takes off his shoes. “Uh... I think we have coffee— yeah Tubbo drinks it like nothing else. We also have tea and hot chocolate.”

“Coffee please.”

“How do you like it?” Tommy asks, “Sugars, milks... what else do you put in coffee?”

“It’s fine as it is,” Wilbur says.

Tommy nods and gets to work, turning on the kettle before scampering around in the cupboard to find the coffee grounds.

Wilbur takes his shoes off before wandering to look around the apartment like he’s never seen it before. He walks up to the new bookshelf they have, the one that doesn’t need to be held up by a diploma anymore, something that is rather nice if he says so himself.

He smiles slightly, before sitting on the couch.

“Nice,” Wilbur says, “You have a rug and everything now,” he taps his feet on the rug.

Tommy nods, attempting to find the coffee plunger with minimal success. He looks under the sink next. Where the *fuck* is this thing? Just because he doesn’t drink coffee doesn’t mean he shouldn’t know where everything is.

Eventually he finds it before putting the coffee grounds into it. He’s not sure how many scoopy things he’s supposed to do of the grounds so he puts in... like five.

Tommy realises something with a cold sort of horror.

His Theseus costume is on his bed.

Which is in the bedroom with a *very* open door right now.

He splutters for a moment, almost knocking the coffee plunger off the counter.

Wilbur stands up and it really looks like he's heading to Tommy's room—

Fuck fuck fuck fuck shit shit shit that is not good that is not good at all.

Tommy panics, which is very in character for him.

What's he supposed to do?

He looks at the coffee plunger on the counter, before looking at Wilbur.

Then he throws the coffee plunger at the floor.

What Tommy did not know about that coffee plunger is that it is glass. It shatters at his feet and Tommy swears as it does so.

Wilbur whirls around and looks at him, then the broken glass around his feet. "Oh, shit— Tommy are you okay? Do you feel light-headed?"

"No, no, no," Tommy says, "Just... clumsy as shit."

Wilbur nods slowly, and apparently his little chicken brain has forgotten everything he had to do and so he goes quiet and sits back down on the couch, apparently forgetting everything that was previously important to him.

Tommy starts to clean the mess that is the coffee plunger, Wilbur seems to realise exactly what is happening and rushes over to help.

They clean up the broken glass and somehow Tommy doesn't end up with annoying cuts all across his hands, which is a new thing for him but something he is more than willing to accept. It's actually... kinda nice.

Wilbur goes back to his spot on the couch.

Thank fuck.

Now they have a broken coffee plunger—

Wait.

How the everloving fuck is Tommy gonna deal with the broken plunger, Purpled *and* Tubbo are gonna team up and kill him and then he's dead.

Instead he looks at his arguably rich friend, Wilbur who is looking at the dinosaur stickers that litter the TV with both amazement and some sort of disgust as he squints at it, it's almost funny, Tommy decides.

“Why dinosaurs?” Wilbur asks.

Ah fuck. Now Tommy can't make coffee.

Hot chocolate? He gets the packet stuff out of the cupboard and turns on the kettle, he is aware that's the wrong way to make hot chocolate— with warm water rather than milk like a sane person. But it means that Tubbo won't take his hot water chocolate and so Tommy is willing to take that sacrifice.

Wilbur does not appear to be a fan and he scrunches up his nose, but he's a lot kinder than Tommy perhaps gives him credit for so he goes quiet and watches at Tommy moves about the kitchen.

“So...” Tommy says, “How was your day?” He drawls, and Wilbur rolls his eyes, it’s not without a certain level of fondness.

“Good!” Wilbur responds brightly, with a bit more brightness and cheerfulness than he normally has but what can you do? “Fundy’s feeling better again!”

“Really?” Tommy stops what he’s doing. “Is he outta hospital or—”

“He’s coming back to work soon,” Wilbur says and his smile is infectious, Tommy can feel it in his voice and can see the pride in his eyes. It’s very sweet and Tommy finds himself smiling too. “He has a hearing aid,” Wilbur adds, thoughtfully, “And he really enjoys turning that off to tune me out, but he’s alright. He’s doing good.”

“I’m glad,” Tommy says, and he means it.

Eventually the hot chocolate is done, and Tommy makes his way down to the couch before placing both mugs on the rickety coffee table situation they have going on, and Wilbur scowls again.

“So?” Wilbur eyes the hot chocolate. “Why water?”

“It keeps warmer for longer,” Tommy says, “And Tubbo— my roommate refuses to drink it if it’s been done with water, so for me it’s the perfect repellent and he doesn’t try to steal my hot chocolates, which is always nice and we love for me.”

Wilbur snorts, reaching for his still basically boiling hot chocolate.

“Don’t—” Tommy says, “That will super burn your tongue. Don’t be doin’ that, it’s not good for you—”

Wilbur responds by flipping him off, picking up the mug and attempting to have a drink out of it. It apparently does burn his tongue because he yelps and looks at Tommy with a certain level of betrayal in his eyes.

Tommy smiles sweetly, and Wilbur flips him off.

He leans in Wilbur's direction grinning widely, "Wow, if *only* someone who is amazing and super smart and pog warned you about how hot that hot chocolate was— someone who'd always want the best for you."

Wilbur grabs his face with one hand while holding the mug in his other hand.

Tommy swats at his hand, and Wilbur's grip on his face tightened.

"Let me go!" Tommy says.

Wilbur manages to not burn his throat down as he swallows because he looks at Tommy and glares a little bit more. "Go away you gremlin."

"No!" Tommy announces, "I don't think I will."

"Oh I think you will," Wilbur mutters, "I can and will tip this hot chocolate over you—"

"I'd like to see you try motherfucker," Tommy grins, "I have the power of Phil and Twitter on my side, whether you like it or not, and you're just gonna have to live with that or perish because of it."

"What the fuck is *Twitter* gonna do?"

“Get you fired.”

“And what would that do?”

“Get me revenge,” Tommy decides, he does this with a nod of his head and a smile. “So... suck on that Wilbur Soot...”

“Shut the fuck up, turn on the TV.”

“No.”

“Now.”

“Okay,” Tommy reaches for the remote without any fanfare and sighs as he throws the remote at Wilbur. “We have Netflix too, we don’t have like... Disney or Hulu or Amazon Prime or whatever—”

“Why?” Wilbur asks.

“Not all of us are rich, *Wilbur*. You probably have Spotify premium like a fuckin’ tory wanker.”

“I— yeah I listen to music while on patrol?”

“You do?” Tommy shrieks, “What do you listen to?”

Wilbur pauses, “Okay you can’t make fun of me—” he puts his mug down.

“I’m going to make fun of you—”

“I explicitly just said you can’t do that—”

“I’m gonna do it anyway.”

“No the fuck you aren’t.”

“Too late!” Tommy grins, “I’m making fun of you!”

“I listen to... recently...” Wilbur covers both of his hands with his face. “I’ve been listening to My Chemical Romance.”

“You have not,” Tommy says, “I have to tell Twitter—”

He reaches for his phone and Wilbur dives for the phone at the same time.

Both of them manage to grab hold of the phone and they struggle over the phone for a while, neither of them win which isn’t that shocking. Tommy is not giving up his phone and Wilbur is not giving up his pride even if it kills him.

It doesn’t kill him, but if it did he probably wouldn’t win.

Wilbur eventually manages to get a well placed kick in the ribs. (Wow that’s familiar.) And Tommy yelps, letting go of the phone. He grabs Tommy’s phone, before running a few steps back and Tommy just... stares at him with contempt.

It’s Wilbur’s turn for the snarky grin.

“What’s your password?”

Tommy opens his mouth and closes it again. “It’s uh... Theseus...” Tommy trails off and Wilbur just gives him a look. “Look it’s something I remember! I tried to have it as my name in numbers and then my last name and then— I kept forgetting so it’s Theseus...”

Wilbur just looks *so* impossibly tired, and... yeah Tommy’s not gonna hold that against the poor man.

“Tommy—”

“It’s funny!”

With an eye roll Wilbur unlocks his screen and judging by the blue glow that covers his face he goes into Twitter.

Did Tommy log out... of the Theseus account.

He did... right— right... that’s... yeah he logged out of the Theseus account.

Right?

Oh shit he didn’t sign out of the Theseus account.

No. No.

He did.

He's simply just decided now at that moment, he logged out because if he didn't he'd just start crying.

Wilbur grins before throwing Tommy's phone back at him.

With a sigh, Tommy picks up his phone and opens his account. His notifications are already blowing up so it can not be good.

@arandomintern: spectre is my favourite hero, (true, not clickbait, very emotional, cops were called.)

Tommy just looks at Wilbur.

"Spectre was," Tommy says.

"Wait what?"

"He was my favourite hero when I was a kid..." Tommy trails off slowly, before shaking his head. "Well— you were like the underdog y'know? Everyone liked Spectre because no one expected much from him, he had the legacy of a dead hero and his father to live up to and... well— I felt like I could relate to that bit."

"Oh," Wilbur whispers.

"Do not cry." Tommy says. "You are not allowed to cry—"

"I'm not crying!" Wilbur says as he cries, "I am *not* crying I am simply too built different for that. I would never cry. I have never cried— not once, I am not crying. That's so sweet what the fuck. Okay maybe I am crying but like a little."

Tommy just gives him a look.

“That’s so sweet what the fuck, Tommy.”

Tommy sighs, “Dream’s my favourite now.”

“That’s fair,” Wilbur continues wiping his eyes. “Dream is pretty fuckin’ cool.”

Tommy grins. “Yeah, he’s way cooler than this bitch called Wilbur.”

Wilbur just looks at him. “Don’t be annoying—”

“No. I think I will.”

“No, you will not.”

“If I’m not allowed to be annoying—” Tommy pauses, frowning and humming at Wilbur. “I’ll kill you,” Tommy deadpans, “Just like punch you really hard in the nose. Then your tiny brain will explode.”

“It will not,” Wilbur defends (weakly), his brain would totally explode if he got punched in the nose.

“It will!”

“I have been punched in the nose before and been fine!”

Tommy pauses, Wilbur brings up an excellent point if he's being completely honest.

“Were you?” Tommy says, because he’s a disaster of a human. “Were you really fine? Or did you just think you were fine—”

“Huh?”

“Be quiet king,” Tommy says, “I’m watchin’,” he looks at the channel that’s on. He has no clue what this show is. It looks like some trashy reality show that him and Purpled would watch when they’re sad. “This show.”

“Ah yes. The famous hit TV show *‘This Show’*. ”

“Wilbur?”

“Yes.”

“Shut the fuck.”

Wilbur opens his mouth to respond and the door swing opens.

Sure enough, it’s uh... Tubbo standing there. He looks a mix of exhausted and angry— which is an accurate depiction of Tubbo these days.

Tubbo’s eyes land on Wilbur where he stares for a long moment.

“What the fuck is he doing?” Tubbo snaps.

Wilbur is very quickly on his feet, there's something almost trained there that Tommy doesn't really want to think about.

"I'm allowed to have people over."

"I would appreciate some *warning*. Why the fuck are you even here?"

"Just got released from the hospital, not like you came to check on that," Tommy says. He tries to keep the bitterness out of his tone, but he fails.

Tommy has seen Tubbo murderous, he has seen Tubbo through some of his worst times. They've both seen each other through the worst times of their lives. But there is this... look in Tubbo's eyes that Tommy hates.

It's not anger, it's more like sadness.

Tubbo just stares at him, his mouth half open. "Fuck off," Tubbo says. He tries for there to be malice behind it, something angry— but it just comes out sad. Even Tommy can pick that up. "Just—" he looks at Wilbur and something hardens in his eyes. "You need to go."

"More than happy to do that!" Wilbur announces, getting off the couch. He chugs the last of his hot chocolate and it can not be comfortable because he scowls like the very thing has wronged him before putting the mug on the table.

He looks at Tommy and there's hesitation for a moment, "You gonna be alright?"

"Yes he's—" Tubbo starts.

“Wasn’t talking to you,” Wilbur snaps, and Tubbo physically flinches back— something that Wilbur doesn’t see because he’s turned back to look at Tommy. “You gonna be okay?”

“I’ll be good,” Tommy says.

There’s another moment of hesitation and Wilbur runs before running the fuck out of that building.

Tubbo watches him go then slams the door behind him.

“What the *fuck* are you thinking?” Tubbo hisses, “Yeah let a hero into our apartment, one that houses two illegal vigilantes, someone from an illegal fighting ring and someone who has probably swindled thousands of dollars from the government.”

Tommy just looks at him. “Tubbo... I was just bein’ polite.”

“Well fuck that,” Tubbo says, “Do you want to get us all arrested because it seems like you want to get us all arrested.”

“You got mail,” Tommy gestures to the envelope on the couch.

He’s more than good to try and change this subject, Tubbo just scowls.

“Open it, I don’t give a shit. Tommy you’re being dangerous, and it’s not just you now. It’s not just you trying to live here, if it was I wouldn’t give a shit— fuck up your own life however you want but Ranboo and I don’t want to get arrested.”

Tommy opens the envelope, it’s just a letter from the school and he hands it out to Tubbo, who snatches it out of his hand.

“Since when is it me and Purpled against you and Ranboo, we’re friends— we’re a team, that’s why we work together, that’s why we live together. You can’t decide to split us among ourselves, that’s not fair.”

“It’s always been me and Ranboo,” Tubbo spits. “You’re just the kid stupid enough to take us in.”

Tubbo’s not angry. Not really. Tommy can see it, he’s not sure how he can see it, but he knows Tubbo. He knows Tubbo when he’s angry— this isn’t it, he knows Tubbo when he’s sad, this is almost it.

He just seems scared, his angry face and harsh words are at best a glass facade. He’s just... scared, and Tommy is mad at himself that he wasn’t able to see it before... that he couldn’t see how much Tubbo was hurting earlier and he got mad.

“I know you don’t mean that,” Tommy sips at his hot chocolate, and Tubbo somehow looks even more mad. “You can say you do, and I won’t blame you. But I know you Tubbo, and I know you’re not that kinda person.”

Tubbo looks at him, “And what exactly do you know about me?”

“I know that you were hurting,” Tommy says, he stands up and Tubbo doesn’t move away. “And I didn’t pay attention as well as I should have, and I’m sorry.”

Tubbo looks at him.

He does not say a word but turns around and walks off to his room.

Tommy tries not to feel too disappointed but he fails.

With a sigh he runs a hand down his face.

Tubbo hides in his room for the rest of the night, even as Purpled, Ranboo and him sit on the couch eating pasta bake. It's actually pretty good, Ranboo's apparently decided to get good at cooking which is good news for him.

"What do you reckon would happen," Ranboo says, "If this pasta was actually beans."

"What?" Purpled says, "What does that even mean—"

"If I made pasta bake but with beans."

"Now why the fuck would you do that?"

"Fun?" Ranboo says, "You can crunch on them."

"Are you cooking the beans?" Purpled asks, "Why are we crunching on them? And what sort of beans are we eating?"

"Baked."

"Baked beans?" Purpled repeats.

Tommy shovels the pasta bake into his mouth, not watching either of them as he watches the TV and tries to stop himself from dropping pasta bake on the couch and adding to the mess that is... well the couch if he's being completely honest.

"You're making pasta bake with *baked beans*?"

“Sure,” Ranboo says, “Like what’s the worst that happens?”

“You die.” Tommy deadpans. “If you make pasta bake with baked beans then that wouldn’t make it pasta bake. It would make it baked beans with like... cheese on them.”

“True, true,” Ranboo takes another bite, “Okay. What if I put a cinnamon roll into cereal?”

“Wouldn’t it soak up the milk?” Purpled scowls, “So you’d have this milk mass at the bottom of your cereal.”

“What if I broke it up?”

“Why would you even have a cinnamon roll for breakfast?”

“Because I’m *sad, Purpled.*” Ranboo says, “So when you’re sad you make bad decisions, are you really mentally unstable unless you’re eating cinnamon rolls at like six in the morning?”

Tommy just sighs, “Ranboo. Where did the cinnamon rolls go? I got some like last week and I only had one.”

“We had cinnamon rolls?” Purpled looks at Tommy accusingly, “And you didn’t tell me? What the *fuck* Tommy?”

“Yeah because I wanted them all to myself,” Tommy pokes his tongue out at Purpled and Purpled rolls his eyes. “Ranboo, did you put all the cinnamon rolls in your cereal?”

“Well would ya look at the time!” Ranboo scrapes the last of the pasta bake out of his bowl, “Ender— I just have so many appointments and things to do. It’s crazy how that works, complete coincidence.”

Tommy sighs. “Ranboo I swear to Prime—”

Rudely his phone interrupts his amazing lecture.

Purpled is closest to it.

“Who is it?”

“Techno,” Purpled picks up his phone and chucks it to him. “Also the photo you have of him is terrifying.”

Techno’s contact photo is a photo that Tommy took... he can’t remember, but the camera is way too close to his face and it is not flattering at all. The angle sucks, the closeness of the camera sucks— it’s a terrible photo and Tommy loves it.

“Hello?” Tommy says.

“I think I know someone who can help you get sorted whatever the fuck happened on Friday.”

“Wait, what?”

“I know someone who knows lots of people, and I think he can help us figure out what the fuck happened— and teach you how to control it.”

“Huh... wait, wait, hold up go back like three steps— what do you mean?”

“I talked to him like... a day or two ago and basically I think what we think happened is that you did something to his memory, maybe making him re-remember and live through bad things.”

“Oh— okay?”

“*My plan,*” Techno says, “*Is to take you to Redding.*”

“What?”

“*You’ll be fine, it’s safe now— and no Purpled can not come.*”

“Damn.”

“*And we’ll try to get your powers under control.*”

“Okay? Uh— when?”

“*Tomorrow mornin’, I’ll pick you up.*”

“You can’t drive?”

“*I can.*”

And then he hangs up.

Which makes this perhaps the weirdest conversation Tommy has ever had and he was just talking about baked bean pasta bake with his friends. He stares at his phone for a second or two, before sighing.

Okay then. Looks like Tommy is going on an adventure tomorrow.

Tubbo doesn't leave his room the rest of the night, apparently he doesn't eat either, despite Ranboo taking in a bowl of pasta bake. As he returns about fifteen minutes later with only half the pasta bake in the bowl and with about half of it on his hoodie.

Ranboo and Tommy have a knowing look between them, and Ranboo almost looks upset.

"It's alright," Tommy says, and he's not quite sure who he's trying to tell.

"I know." Is Ranboo's reply, and Tommy doesn't know who he's trying to tell either.

For once Tommy sleeps alright.

Nightmares don't wake him up, Tubbo screaming doesn't wake him up, Purpled crying but sneakily doesn't wake him up. It's a good nights sleep, for once in his life, which is great because now is not the time to have his powers glitch the fuck out.

He wakes up at five in the morning, then hates himself a little because that is far too early.

Purpled is hanging halfway out the window.

They look at each other.

"Yes?" Purpled says.

"Why?"

“Because—” Purpled says, “I have work off today, I might do a long patrol. Twelve hour type beat.”

“Okay...” Tommy says slowly, “What are you doing? You’d rather die than patrol for like twelve hours.”

“Honestly?”

“Honestly.”

“I want to order McDonald’s in the...” he gestures at himself, “Vigilante get up and watch the media freak out. Also I won’t have to pay because it’s Logstedchire and everyone here loves me.”

“Okay. Stay safe.”

“Because of that, I will not,” Purpled steps out of the window, before glancing back over his shoulder. “Can you boost me over to the next building?”

Tommy sighs, before doing so.

Purpled flies across the gap between their apartment and the one higher up, he lands on his feet and does a fancy roll thing— probably to show off, but it works. Purpled waves at Tommy, and Tommy waves back.

Then Purpled turns around and runs off.

Tommy decides he’s had enough and goes back to sleep.

He wakes up naturally and nicely for once in his life, before realising that he has places to be, he scrambles out of bed and stumbles around the apartment attempting to get ready. He almost falls over several times.

He manages to get ready, before grabbing a hoodie to pull it over his head.

There's a knock at the door and Tommy falls over, he's still half in the hoodie.

"Come in!" Tommy yells, still fighting with his hoodie.

The door opens and Techno stands there.

Tommy can feel the judgement without even seeing him. "Why does it look like you're fightin' a hoodie... and losing?"

"Because I am." Tommy mutters, "You knocked and I got jumpscared and now I'm laying on the floor like a fuckin' loser."

"I'd say," Techno says. "Well... have fun with that."

"You're literally the worst."

"I am literally in your top five favourite people."

"You're literally not," Tommy lies. "You're... last on the list."

"Last?"

“Yeah.” Tommy goes quiet for a moment, still fighting with his hoodie. “Can you help me?”

Techno sighs. Before basically picking Tommy up off the ground and pulling the hoodie he’s having a battle with down.

“You good?”

Tommy just glares, “Thanks,” he mutters. “Fuck you.”

“Now why are you pissed this time?”

Tommy glares.

That makes Techno smile and roll his eyes. “Come on kid, we need to get these powers sorted out.”

Tommy crosses his arms and scowls.

Techno just responds by ruffling his hair. This makes Tommy swat at him and Techno just responds by lazily ducking away from it.

“So are you driving or—”

“Okay... so kinda,” Techno says. “I’m not supposed to... like legally... but I mean technically they can’t make me.”

Tommy just looks at him, “Can’t we just walk.”

“... we were gonna do that anyway...” Techno mumbles, “But yeah. Let’s go— we have meetings to do and people to meet and... I dunno weird power shit to figure out.”

“My powers aren’t that weird.”

“They fuckin’ are.”

“They are not!” Tommy closes and locks the door behind him, doing the final check for wallet, phone and keys, all of which he has. “They’re like... I’d describe them as like— another part of me.”

“Huh?”

“Like—” Tommy groans, and they start walking down the stairs. “It’s me, but also not really.”

Techno looks actually interested which is something that Tommy will take and run with completely.

“Like... yes my powers are me, but there’s something else there. Like... I trust them to keep me safe and I suppose they make sure I... like stay alive and I eat well and take care of myself or they don’t work.”

“So they’re... an extension?”

“Kinda,” Tommy pauses, trying to get his words together to little success. “I dunno— it’s hard to explain really. Like I’m not in control of them most of the time... it feels like I’m just suggesting to them to do whatever I want?”

“That kinda makes sense.”

“Your face kinda makes sense,” Tommy mutters.

“What does that even mean—”

“Fuck you.”

Techno just sighs and they get onto the street. “You exhaust me.”

“You love me.”

Techno just looks at him, “Yeah... that was my mistake.”

Tommy just beams at that.

The walk is... surprisingly quiet for Tommy being there, they chat every now and again but there's something comfortable about the silence that settles around them as they walk. Techno has his hands in his pockets the entire time, and Tommy will start using his hands when he gets into a particularly intense story.

It's nice.

Eventually Tommy and Techno get to what must be the spot because Techno sighs, looking at the building.

“That's a fish factory.”

“I know, Tommy.”

“Why are we at a fish factory?”

“That’s where the Redding entrance is, Tommy,” he sounds tired and Tommy doesn’t blame him for that. Keeping up with a sixteen year old must be a lot of effort. Hence why everyone in the existence of the world complains about it.

“So... Reddings... am I going to get stabbed?”

“No, Tommy.”

“Not even a little?”

“I might stab you if you’re not quiet,” Techno snaps.

That somehow gets Tommy to be quiet (a minor miracle).

Techno sighs before taking the first steps around to what is the side of a fence. It’s a rather dodgy fence at best, with dodgy bits of wood that are rotting and bits that have been straight up bashed in.

If Tommy remembers anything from his limited time at high school it’s that parties used to happen here. He never went to any because he had the most depressing teenage years possible but judging by the bottles strewn around not a lot has changed.

Tommy snorts at that, and Techno looks at him.

“Bottles.”

“Okay?”

“It’s funny, teenagers never change.”

“You— are a teenager?”

“Excellent point,” Tommy opens his mouth to say more before realising that... yeah Techno’s right and Tommy should probably just stay quiet.

Techno rolls his eyes before pushing a section of wood away.

“I’m gonna jump over it.”

“You’re not gonna jump over it.”

“I’m gonna jump over it.”

“Tommy—”

Tommy takes a step back. He can actually do this one. He just needs to push off the fence and get his hands onto the top. Ideally he doesn’t even have to use his powers. Tommy grins at Techno, “Have you tried gettin’ good?”

“Tommy I literally have a prosthetic leg if I try to jump up onto that my leg’s just gonna go through it. Your leg is probably going to go straight through it.”

Tommy just looks at him. “You’re just hating.”

“Tommy—”

“Hater,” Tommy returns.

“You’re gonna hurt yourself.”

“Hating, you are literally being a hater—”

“Tommy shut the fuck up.”

Tommy does not, he’s never been great at doing that whole ‘being quiet’ thing. So instead he flips Techno off.

He runs at the fence, and manages to get one of his feet up onto the fence and pushes off slightly. His hands curl around the top of the fence.

He manages to hold himself there, so he takes what could be a vital moment and instead looks at Techno and sticks out his tongue. “Fuck you!”

With more effort than he’ll ever admit, he manages to launch himself over the fence and lands on the ground with a thump. His ankle now aches and he’s perhaps made the worst decision possible but he proved Techno wrong so really— it’s all kinda worth it.

Techno moves a single wooden plank out of the way before walking through a gap already there. He puts the wooden plank back and just gives his most deadpan expression towards Tommy.

Tommy gives a toothy grin.

He gets up onto his feet and winces.

“Did you hurt your ankle?”

“No—”

Techno just sighs.

He walks towards a bunch of crates set on the ground, they don't look like much of anything and Tommy squints as he approaches them. He's not sure what to think about it, Techno taps on one of the crates.

Tommy raises an eyebrow, it is possible that Techno's finally lost it. That is something that he needs to consider.

Techno taps on another box. “Oi!” He yells at the box.

What the fuck?

“Techno—”

“Tommy, be quiet,” Techno says, “I know you can see this.”

They're in the back of a factory and Techno is screaming at some boxes, this is honestly not how he thought his day would go. Tommy walks over so he's standing behind Techno and peering over his shoulder.

Tommy goes to turn around.

Then one of the boxes open, the crate opens to reveal a small ramp that leads into no where in particular.

Tommy's first impression of Redding is about as good as he could hope. With about three guns pointed directly at his face. So he does the big manly thing and hides behind Techno.

The three people who are pointing a gun at his face are as following:

A woman with braids and flowers threaded through them.

Man with black hair wearing a black hoodie with an apple on it— Tommy has no clue why he notices that, and the fact he has both a knife and another gun on various belts and holsters, he glares at them.

And... a man in a criminal colour of piss green, he seems the most uncomfortable with the gun and holds it like it's somehow wronged him.

"Hi!" Techno says, and Tommy peeks around his shoulder. "Uh— fancy seein' you here, TapL?"

"You were here like three days ago." TapL deadpans.

"Less."

"Less?" TapL repeats, "What the fuck—"

"Rule of Mercy, you have to let in me and my guest— anyway I have an appointment with Bad."

Tommy waves at the woman, who's smile brightens and she smiles back with the hand not holding the gun directly at their faces. She seems nice!

"I'm Hannah," she says easily, "Uh—" she glances at the aforementioned TapL and then at the person in the horrible hoodie, "These are TapL and Fruit... and I probably should not have given our real names but whatever."

She sighs slightly, before holding out her hand. "Chiron is the official title."

Techno's eyes widen for a moment.

"Nice to meet you," Tommy shakes her hand, "Uh— I'm Tommy?"

"Well nice to meet you Tommy," Hannah says, "Now can I ask what the fuck your friend and you are doing here before I shoot you?"

"Oh, I know this one," Tommy says, Techno moves out of his way a little. He stumbles for words but that's kinda hard when there are a couple of guns pointed at him. "Nevermind— I do not know this one, it turns out."

He looks at Techno helplessly, who sighs.

"Power control, we think surely he has to know someone who can help get this kid's powers under control."

"Powers?" Hannah raises an eyebrow, "What powers could he have that are so—"

"Memory manipulation." Techno deadpans.

The three of their reactions are hilarious, their eyes widen at the same time and their jaws go slack. “What the fuck?” The one in green— Fruit whispers, “We thought that power was like —”

“Super, super rare,” Hannah manages.

Well good news, they’re no longer pointing three guns at him. All of them are staring at him like he’s just lost his fucking mind. Which... is looking more and more possible judging by the reactions they’re giving him.

“There is no way,” TapL starts.

“Well there is way,” Techno snaps, “This happened and you can either not believe us, and tell Bad or you can believe us and still tell Bad because we both know I’m right you just don’t want to believe it.”

TapL’s scowl deepens.

“Uh... you heard about the fighting ring leader?” Tommy says slowly, “The one that— uh I guess you guys had at your ring?”

Both TapL and Fruit’s eyes widened a little, and Hannah also looked shocked.

“Fuckin’ Barty?” TapL says, “ *You* were the one that fucked him up?”

“Yeah...”

“Holy fuck,” Hannah whispers. “Almost felt bad for the guy.”

“Did you?” Techno asks.

“Yeah... because he was already injured and then one of our guys killed him.”

“Wait— what?” Tommy says, “He’s dead?”

He looks at Techno with wide eyes, his heart speeds up and his lungs seem to constrict in his body. Threatening to squeeze all the breath out of him, “I killed someone?”

“No, no, no,” Hannah says, and her voice is surprisingly kind for someone who was holding a gun at them a couple of minutes ago. “This was not you, he was injured but he was expected to be fine and then he was released from police custody. Then one of Elysium got him and now he’s... probably in a dumpster.”

Tommy almost takes the words without thinking about them, he almost accepts them without even thinking about them. He looks at Techno with wide eyes. “Elysium?” He squawks, “You took me to an Elysium hideout—”

“You... did not tell him.” TapL deadpans. “That’s kinda important to say, especially if someone works for the heroes. Not everyone is like you Tech, with a million fuckin’ connections to Elysium.”

“You work for Elysium?” Tommy says.

“No!” Techno yells, “No I do not. Tommy, do I look like the kinda guy that would work for an organisation actively trying to kill Wilbur?”

“They’re actively trying to kill Wilbur?”

TapL sighs.

Hannah looks incredibly amused by this entire thing, in fact she actually laughs, before getting odd looks from Fruit and TapL.

She forces her face to go blank a moment later, “Techno— I’ve heard a lot about you from these two,” she gestures to Fruit and TapL beside her. “Very conflicting things, but you really should’ve told the kid *what* he was walking into before he had to... y’know walk into it.”

“Yeah I’m realising that now,” Techno hisses back.

Hannah apparently does not like the tone Techno uses because she lifts up the gun again, a bit lazier than last time and she points it at his chest. “Okay, kid. This is an Elysium base— but before that it’s a blue hybrid caring facility... although it’s more like a community. Bad, the leader of Redding Street and... someone from Elysium I guess, made a deal that they would provide medical support to Redding and Redding would be a hideout when needed and their doctors would have to be ready to treat angels. Got it?”

Tommy nods.

“Okay,” Hannah sighs, “If you tell anyone, anyone about what you see here. Heroes... friends... anything about the internal organisation of Elysium I will personally— wait how old are you?”

“Nineteen.”

“Sixteen.” Techno says at the same time.

They both look at each other, then back at the group.

“Sixteen.” Tommy says.

“Nineteen.” Techno says at the same time.

They look at each other.

“You really need to tell me what story you’re going with,” Techno says, “I was trying to get you sympathy points.”

“Well I am trying not to tell everyone I meet my deepest secrets,” Tommy deadpans.

“Well I didn’t know it was a secret!”

“How?” Tommy says, “Literally how.”

“Well these guys don’t give a shit— you were about to be threatened, they can’t threaten a sixteen-year-old, like ethically.”

“We can.” TapL says.

“Be quiet,” Tommy and Techno snap, turning to look at TapL, then turning back to face each other.

“Your narrative changes with everyone we meet.”

“I’m not gonna tell Elysium my actual age.”

“They don’t even know your actual age!” Techno points at Fruit, “Do you know how old this child is?”

“I am not a child—”

“He looks... about sixteen. But now you’re arguing and I’m confused.”

“Good,” Tommy snaps. Before turning back and crossing his arms. “Ignore everything Techno says ever. He’s a bitch.”

“Now that’s true,” TapL adds.

TapL looks mildly concerned and Hannah looks tired.

“Okay, you’re young. Maybe I won’t personally kill you,” Hannah finishes, “But if you tell anyone about what you see. The location— the organisation— you will... probably be kidnapped? I think most people feel bad about killin’ a kid.”

“Most,” TapL adds darkly and shoots Techno a look.

Techno doesn’t flinch away and Tommy has fuckin’ no idea what that’s supposed to mean. Is Techno gonna kill him? Tommy doubts that, he fully thinks if it came down to it Tommy would beat Techno in a fight.

He’d for sure beat Wilbur up, easily. Wilbur was scrawny and Tommy was probably stronger than him.

“So...” Techno says, “Can we... be let in?”

“Please?”

“Sure!” Hannah says she stops pointing the gun at Techno. “Have any questions, Tommy?”

“Uh— don’t think so,” Tommy says, he follows after all of them.

What they walk into is a... super fucking creepy tunnel.

It looks like if a horror movie setting came to life. It’s a long tunnel with a smoothed out bottom and the creepiest tiny lights on either side to give at least *some* light. Standing in front of about half of the tiny ass lights are... people dressed ominously in black with guns litter various points across the hallway.

Tommy grabs Techno’s arm and drags him slightly closer. “Is it supposed to look like we’ll get fuckin’ murdered on the spot?” He whispers.

Techno looks amused.

They walk down the creepy ass hallway, and Tommy has some intense eye contact with ever guard they pass, to the point where they look uncomfortable and start shifting at their spots. It’s almost funny, even when Techno gives him a look at every guard they pass who Tommy makes uncomfortable.

Tommy is the alpha male and he will not let anyone forget it.

Eventually they reach what seems like a golden vault door, like one of those huge bank doors. Two guards stand in front of it and they have the most dangerous looking guns as Tommy stares back at them with wide eyes.

Are those semi-automatic?

He glances at Techno nervously, Techno just looks and gives him a nod.

Somehow that manages to flood Tommy's body with relief and he looks back at the bank door.

TapL nods, "Open the door please fellas," he glances at Tommy and Techno at the back of the small cluster of people they have gathered. "We have a repeat guess and a new guess."

"What names?" One of them ask.

Hannah glances at Techno and Tommy. "Techno and Tommy... a warning, they are an associate of Hector."

Techno's mouth falls open and it's like all the blood drains from his face.

Is Hector a dickhead or something?

Techno shakes his head.

One of the guards hums, before reaching towards the vault door.

They type something into the keypad.

5747836

Tommy shocks himself at the fact that with paying attention he actually notices it. He commits that to memory in the back of his brain—you never know when attempting to break into Redding Street is something that someone needs to know.

5747836. 5747836.

That feels important.

Tommy decides to put that away for later, just in case.

TapL and Techno keep glaring at each other, and Tommy is about ninety percent sure that TapL has a knife at his side and he's pretty sure that Techno is getting ready to turn TapL into dust underneath his foot.

Cool.

Tommy is going to ignore that.

The vault door opens and light floods everything. Tommy holds his arm up to the light and tries to save his eyes a little bit of the harshness of the light.

Eventually they adjust and they all stumble out.

The first thing Tommy notices is that Redding is... stunning.

He doesn't say that lightly but he's in love with it all. The colours of the bricks and the vines climbing up the bricks. Climbing higher and higher, it's just... so green and colourful the flowers brighten up everything and they cover every possible surface and then some. There's pink and blue and there's purple seeping through the cracks.

Green covers every possible surface, and where it isn't green there is life. In the bricks, in the stones, in the way the light shines down and warms the entire area. In the little plants at his feet, in the smell of roses and flowers which all together is a bit of a mess but there's something so relaxing about it.

There's something amazing about it all, Tommy can almost taste grass on his tongue. There's people chattering around them, some of them are Techno and TapL he can hear them arguing,

but he focuses on the landscape around them. It is... so, so pretty.

A hand on his shoulder snaps him out of it and he turns around to look at Hannah. Hannah's face is a bit softer than it was a while away and she overall looks rather kind about the entire thing. "You okay?"

"Yeah..." Tommy trails off before looking out across the alleyway, "It's just incredible."

Hannah smiles, "Yeah... it is rather incredible." She looks out across everything as well and a fond smile covers her face. "How are you feelin'?"

"Hmm?"

"Well about Elysium—" Hannah says, "Like... as a concept, as an organisation, whatever you wanna call it."

"I understand it," Tommy whispers. "I— I understand why."

That makes Hannah smile a small bit, "Well, Elysium and you probably have more in common than you and the heroes ever have. If you need us, we're here."

Tommy side-eyes Hannah. "I'm not going to join an organisation that's trying to kill my friends."

"Fair enough," Hannah says easily, "You're pretty loyal— don't give that up easily, lots of people would kill for someone like that."

"I'm not as loyal as you think."

“Eh,” Hannah shrugs, “Me neither,” she glances over her shoulder and at everyone else around them. “I don’t really know why I’m here I will be completely honest... I hate half of the people I work for.”

“Like personally?”

Hannah just laughs, “Yeah— it’s personal this time.”

Tommy nods, “Well I respect that—”

“Hello.” Someone says, and Tommy jumps, before grabbing Hannah and pulling her in front of him as a shield.

Wow. He is a fucking coward.

Hannah has a gun out before Tommy can even think about it and points it at the threat.

It’s not a threat.

It’s... *is that Silme?*

Tommy can’t stop himself from pushing Rose aside and looking at Slime like he’s the most incredible thing that’s happened in years. “Slime?” He screeches, “What the fuck are you doing here?”

“You know Slime?” Techno says.

Tommy gives him a look.

“Oh, right.”

Slime looks at Tommy for a long moment, tilting his head at him. “Hello, Thomas.”

That is... a terrible name to be calling him, what the fuck Slime—

“Slime,” TapL says, putting an arm around Slime’s shoulder. “Can you please look after Tommy while we discuss... some things.”

Slime looks between the entire group, before nodding and giving Tommy a wide smile. “Okay! Follow me Thomas from...” he trails off and Tommy’s not sure how to feel about that. “I will show you the upper gardens!”

Tommy looks at Techno.

‘Please don’t make me go.’ Tommy tries to say with his eyes.

Techno seems to get his message, but he doesn’t care either. *‘You can cope with this, kid.’*

‘Please?’

Techno doesn’t say anything and instead shakes his head, which honestly feels a bit like a hate crime. Tommy glares at him, and hopes that Techno can feel all his contempt behind his eyes. He’s decided that he’s never going to forgive Techno for this.

“I’ll get you a new game on your Switch.”

And suddenly Techno is the most amazing person in the world again and Tommy's forgiven him completely.

"Okay!" He says cheerfully.

Techno glances at him. "I'll get you a McFlurry too."

"Fuck yeah!"

So Tommy agrees to go with Slime.

Slime seems pretty excited about the entire thing, so he leads Tommy up a flight of stairs. Tommy will never admit he was tired climbing up. Yes, he can run all across the rooftops and fight people with ease.

No. He can not climb up stairs.

They end up on the roofs of some of the apartments and Tommy looks up at the sky. It looks... slightly off.

"Cloaking technology!" Slime says with a smile, "There's this huge sheet that someone designed over all of Reddings. It hides us from the narcs."

"Why do you say narcs?"

"It's fun!"

"That's fair enough."

Tommy looks up at the sky, he's not sure how it works but he's sure it's super cool.

He looks up the path they're going across. One of the sections is literally a piece of wood wedged between two buildings. And another part looks like Tommy has to swing across a piece of rope.

What the fuck—

He looks at Slime with wide eyes.

Slime has... become about three times smaller and is now walking across the wood between both buildings. He pauses before looking at Tommy. "I have forgotten that you are not small and gooey."

"How does someone—"

Slime just makes... what Tommy assumes is various Slime noises because he grows back to a normal size and shuffles back over the wood. "It will be okay Theseus from Logstedchire," Slime says gently. "I will not let you fall."

Tommy stops himself from looking down.

"I— I don't like heights," Tommy says softly.

"I know, Slime says, "But I know you like gardens and I promise I shall keep you safe from anything that might hurt you. Whether that be falling, or something else."

"That's a big promise."

“Well, I intend to keep it.”

Tommy sighs, before looking out across the plank between the two buildings. It’s pretty high up. And they still have to climb up a ladder and do something else before they’re even in the garden.

“You will not be hurt while I am caring for you,” Slime promises, “I swear.”

Tommy takes a deep breath, he almost wants to close his eyes. Instead of doing that he shuffles over the wooden plank, his heart is in his throat the entire time and he eventually gets to the other side.

Slime beams at him. “Great job Theseus from Logstedchire! I am proud of you!”

Tommy just laughs, and tries to calm down his heart and calm down his breathing. Neither of those go overly amazing but he manages to look at Slime and nod his head.

Slime apparently seems to see how freaked out Tommy is and he sits down on the ground. “We can stay here for a while,” he says gently, and Tommy sits down wordlessly. “Whatever anyone else says, here is the best place to cloud watch. The gardens have too many leafs covering it all.”

Tommy nods, before looking up.

Sure enough there is a section that Tommy can see through perfectly, so his left is also... what looks like a vent.

What is this among us?

“Oh!” Slime announces brightly, “That’s my network.”

“What?” Tommy manages, and finds it hilarious that these are the only words he can manage.
“What do you mean?”

“It’s how I get places!” Slime says cheerfully, “This one leads to the food place.”

“Oh.” Tommy says.

He looks out up at the sky, there aren’t many clouds out but the sky is a clear view from the section he can see. He can also see a few buildings around through the... cover thing that Redding Street apparently has, but mostly just the sky.

Clear and blue and without buildings to disrupt it, with small wispy clouds that he can only see if he squints and focuses on them.

It’s nice.

“I’m ready,” Tommy says calmly, standing up before heading to the ladder that lays in front of them.

The ladder leading up is surprisingly rickety, Tommy almost falls off it when that is perhaps the last thing he wants. He trusts that Slime would catch him if he fell, but that does not stop his heart from thrumming in his chest and for his panic to spike a little bit higher than what he really wants.

Eventually he manages to eventually drag himself up over the edge and look at the garden that Slime decided he simply had to see.

Tommy has no clue how the cloaking roof system thing that Redding has going on works. But he assumes it must hide... whatever this is.

It's an area that is just... green, there's leafy trees that loom overhead, they're some trees Tommy doesn't know but it's stunning either way. Light sneaks its way through the trees in shades of light that frame the entire scene.

Tommy looks at it all, it's all so incredible he barely has the words for it. So he looks at all of it, eyes curious and soaking up everything he can.

Underneath the shade of the leaves and trees some shulker hybrids are floating or sleeping under the trees, there's the noise of greenery rustling and people chattering about... well anything, at least that's what it sounds like.

Tommy stares with a sort of wonder. This garden smells like roses and flowers and just... freshly cut grass and everything that Tommy loves about nature. It smells like nature, and fresh morning air biting on his skin in the best way possible.

As he walks beside Slimecicle, the grass rustles around them, a few people look up at them lazily, raising an eyebrow or tipping an imaginary hat they don't have. Slime tips his imaginary hat back, overall it's just all... rather wholesome Tommy doesn't even know how to describe it.

It is frankly just... lovely.

Covering the ground are trees of all different sizes, with different colours of woods that climb higher and higher into the sky. At the top there appears to be some sorta glass... maybe plastic but it moves slightly, or Tommy is finally losing it, either makes sense.

Flowers litter the shaded ground, and someone is sitting in a particularly big field of flowers, nursing on what looks like it's dying, slowly bringing it back to life and Tommy can't help but watch with a sense of awe.

He has always loved flowers, and watching things come to life, watching even the most ruined and broken of flowers bloom into something beautiful.

His eyes linger there for a moment too long, and Slime appears to notice because he straightens his posture before walking over there.

Tommy follows after him and then there are three people crouched around this flower.

Sitting on the ground is the... hybrid of some sight that Tommy doesn't know. There appears to be... some sort of vine wrapped around their arm, that has flowers sprouting from in, and Tommy truthfully has no clue if that's a part of them or not.

"Hi," Tommy says nervously.

"Hello," they reply, they have a kind voice. The sort of one that Tommy wished he had heard when he was a little bit younger, the sort of voice that is gentle and scratchy and raw and... real amongst it all.

Tommy looks at the flower. "What type of flower?"

"It's a peony poppy," they say, "I'm not quite sure what they represent— but I think they look nice and this poor fella hasn't been getting the sunlight it needs."

Anyone can see that.

But still, Tommy nods.

"Sometimes it just takes a little care and someone who wants to save it," they explain and Tommy feels like they're talking to him rather than about the flower. They have a heavy look in their eyes that Tommy can't quite explain. "We give this little guy the care he needs, and he'll be good as new."

“Yeah...” Tommy says gently, “Move it into a new spot, I think,” Tommy looks around, there’s some sunlight sections that don’t have flowers in it and Tommy thinks that’s the best spot to put it. “I think you should... put it over there,” Tommy points.

They turn around to look there, “That’s a very good suggestion, thank you Tommy.”

“No problem,” Tommy says, standing up and brushing his hands on his legs.

They manage to scoop up the flowers, roots and all before shuffling to the spot in the sun that Tommy had just pointed out.

“That was odd,” Slime says, “Did you introduce yourself Thomas.”

Wait.

Tommy didn’t give them his name—

Slime appears to think nothing of it, and starts walking.

Tommy turns around to look back at them, “Oi!” He says and they look up from their spot on the ground. “How do you know my name?”

They just smile, something still heavy in their gaze. “Most hybrids know you Tommy, whether you know it or not.”

“Huh—”

They just give a sad smile.

“Do they know me as—”

“As what?”

“Uh... Theseus?” He whispers.

He has *no* clue when he got so alright with divulging his biggest secrets with a stranger, but they shake their head. There’s still something so sad in their eyes that Tommy doesn’t even want to try and decode.

“Before that,” they say gently, “Before all of this— when you were a boy.”

Tommy’s heart feels like it drops in his throat.

“Huh?” He whispers.

“You’re a ghost story to most of them,” they continue with their task, digging the hole with their bare hands. “To some of us— the older ones, you’re a painful reminder. Most think you’re dead, some of us are smarter.”

Tommy just stares at them.

“You— you don’t know *shit* about me.”

They pause for a moment, looking up at Tommy. “And no one does, and I think that may be part of the problem.”

Tommy's mouth hangs open as he thinks of something smart to say, but he can't. All the words he may have had just left his mouth, drifting away in a wisp of words and promises he can't keep and a past that he holds so close it no longer feels like his own.

A hand lands on his shoulder and Tommy jumps, turning to face Slime who has little expression on his face that Tommy can decode.

"Follow me..." he pauses like he wants to address Tommy but is not sure what name to use.

Slime walks over to the biggest tree, Tommy wants to say it's an oak tree but he's not completely sure about that.

He sits down against the tree, and Tommy for a reason he can't quite place finds himself sitting next to Slime.

It's relaxing.

Slime has this sort of... charming presence about him, and the garden itself puts any nerves that Tommy does have to rest easily, he closes his eyes and takes in the noises around him.

A piece of heaven, is how he'd describe it.

It is quiet, apart from friendly, soft chatter, and some laughter between people. There are birds somewhere that Tommy can half hear and he can hear the rustling and the swaying of leaves and grass. On his tongue he can almost taste the freshly cut grass and the slightly damp dirt that he's now sitting on.

"Thomas," Slime says and Tommy opens his eyes from his moment of temporary bliss and looks at the man sitting next to him. "Thomas from..." he tilts his head at Tommy as if he's thinking, and then he goes quiet, looking away. "I am unsure about something, Thomas from... somewhere, do I call you Theseus or Thomas or even Tommy?"

“Oh,” Tommy says, he looks ahead for a moment. “I— don’t... know, whatever you want to call me.”

Slime shakes his head like it’s the easiest thing in the world, “No, Thomas, what do *you want* to be called?”

“Tommy,” he says, “It’s... well my name, that’s all there is to it. That’s my name, it’s what I go by, it’s what I want to be called.”

“Very well then, Tommy from... somewhere.”

“Please stop calling me that.”

“Well, I am having a hard time figuring out where you are from Tommy, it seems like you’re from everywhere and nowhere.”

“Logstedchire.”

“Theseus is from Logstedchire,” Slime explains slowly, like the thoughts are only just clicking together for him. “Thomas is from seventy-eight Archer’s Avenue—”

Tommy’s heart drops a little.

“But Tommy... Tommy is from nowhere and everywhere at the same time.”

“Well, I apologise for that then,” Tommy eventually manages to find his voice. His hands are shaking, and he hates knowing that. “I’d say I’m from Logstedchire.”

“As would I.”

They fall into a comfortable sort of silence and Tommy closes his eyes, leaning his head back against the tree and letting himself relax. It is amazing, the sounds of nature and people slowly pulling him off to a sleep that he knows he needs.

“Tommy.”

Tommy opens his eyes, and looks at Slime. “Yes, Slime?”

“Wilbur from The Tower will never accept that you’re Theseus, will he? He accepts you as Thomas from seventy-eight Archer’s Avenue and Tommy from somewhere, but not as Theseus from Logstedchire.”

“I—” Tommy’s voice shakes. “I— I don’t know,” he stammers out.

“I am sorry, I did not mean to upset you.”

“Yeah...” Tommy murmurs, looking down at his still shaking hands. “I don’t think I’ll ever let Wilbur know. I don’t think I’ll let anyone else know— it’s dangerous now, to be a vigilante.”

Slime hums, there’s something wistful in his eyes and something almost sad about the way he is holding himself. “Theseus?”

“Yes?”

“Elysium shall have a place for you—”

“I don’t—”

“The heroes seem like they’ll never accept you,” Slime explains, he’s looking at Tommy with real concern in his eyes now. “No matter what you do, they may accept you as Tommy from somewhere, but no matter what they will never, ever accept you as Theseus.”

Somewhere, Tommy thinks he can feel his heart ripping in two and being laid on the floor as an ugly blob that he doesn’t want to think about.

“Oh—” Tommy whispers, tears that he doesn’t want spring to his eyes. “Never?”

“I think...” Slime hums, apparently thinking, “As long as someone is a hero, they will never truly accept you as a vigilante. They may say that they do, or act like they do— but I think for someone to really accept you as a vigilante they can not be a hero the statement is... is... what is the word?”

“Contradiction?”

“Contradiction,” Slime nods and Tommy’s heart continues to deflate inside his body. “A hero can not accept a vigilante, a vigilante can not accept a hero. Neither will understand each other until they are no longer the opposite of what they can not understand.”

Tommy manages a smile, it’s sad and half a smile at best, but he manages the smile regardless. It doesn’t... quite reach his eyes, and he knows Slime sees that in his face.

“I don’t want to lose them,” Tommy whispers.

It’s a secret that they will hold between them, and that Tommy will hold between himself and thoughts he will never let go of again.

“The ones who really matter,” Slime says, his voice again, careful. “They will not let you lose them.”

Tommy nods, looking straight ahead and hugging his knees to his chest. “And what if I am not one who really matters?”

“You are,” Slimecicle says, there’s something strong in his voice, there’s a certain look in his eyes and a promise in his words that does not stop within the words themselves. “You are cared about, Theseus, Tommy, Thomas, you have many names and each name was given to you with a certain care, you are named because someone cared, you are sitting beside me now because someone cared.”

“Oh,” Tommy whispers.

Slime seems rather content with his response, so he turns away from Tommy, looking out across the garden now, he is quiet and Tommy feels that same sort of quietness in his bones.

It relaxes around him, the comfort of someone he does not know giving him love that he will not understand. Maybe in time he will understand *why* Slime cares about him, why anyone cares about him.

Today is not that time.

But perhaps eventually it will be.

Nor is tomorrow.

Tommy relaxes into the silence with a sort of calmness that washes over him.

Neither of them talk for the rest of their time here.

Eventually a familiar mop of pink hair peeks over one of the ladders, scanning around before his eyes land on Tommy and he scrambles up the ladder. He almost falls over his own feet.

“Fuck off!” Techno yells over his shoulder, “You don’t need to fuckin’ baby sit me everywhere I go.”

“You’d fuckin’ find I do,” someone replies back, hauling themselves up the ladder. It’s someone who appears to be at least a little bit close to Techno judging by the way they’re speaking to him, half swearing. “You’re irresponsible at best—” eyes land on Tommy and they look back at Techno. “You let a *child* in here?”

“I’m not a—”

“Yes, TapL,” Techno says, he sounds more than tired. “I didn’t want to bring a child here...” he turns to look at Tommy, “Tommy, this is TapL he is a whiny bitch and will let you know... and then let you know again for good measure.”

“Okay?” Tommy says slowly, “What do you... need?”

“Bad would like to see us,” Techno says.

TapL crosses his arms and glares a little bit harder. “Wait... *that’s* Tommy?”

Techno seems to tense up, he turns to look at TapL and there’s something dangerous in his eyes. Something that Tommy would not want to cross. It is not any sort of fire or lava, it is a cool acceptance. It appears that both Techno and TapL know the meanings behind their words and glances and they are deadly.

Tommy... does not want any part in this because what the fuck is that?

TapL doesn’t say a lot. He pauses before looking at Tommy, then sliding down the ladder like he’s the main character in a shitty video game. Techno follows him after a moment and Tommy is left with Slime.

“You comin’?”

“I do not believe so,” Slime says, “I don’t think I want to be there when it happens.”

“Huh?” Tommy whispers.

“Do not worry, TapL and Techno are just very... combative, but they are like you and the one who calls himself Purpled—”

“How do you know— oh, you were a vigilante.”

Slime smiles and nods, “They are like if you and the one who calls himself Purpled went down a much darker and fractured past, you will see it if you look for it. They care about each other... despite it all, it is rather entertaining to watch.”

“Oh,” Tommy mumbles. “Okay,” is what he says.

Eventually he gets down the ladder too.

He walks behind Techno, sticking a bit closer than he probably should but people are giving him weird looks and he is *not* a fan of that in the slightest, in fact he is the opposite of a fan at this moment.

The hybrid’s words from earlier seem to almost... taunt him and start playing in his head as he tries to walk ahead with no issue. It does not work, and so Tommy stays quiet as he walks behind Techno.

TapL and Techno also seem to notice the occasional odd look tossed Tommy’s way as they walk down the street.

“Do... you know these guys?” Techno asks, he puts an arm around Tommy’s shoulders in what is a very Wilbur gesture.

“No...” Tommy says, “I— I mean they might know me from somewhere but I don’t know them.”

TapL appears to take this to heart, and especially on one poor hybrid looking at Tommy like they’ve never seen a teenager before. “Oi,” TapL barks, “Get on with it, it’s a teenager, you’ve seen one before. Back off.”

Something flashes in Techno’s eyes but Tommy can get a chance to decode it, it’s gone. He looks at TapL who mutters something under his breath, which honestly he is such a king for.

Techno eventually drops his arm but glares at anyone who even glances at Tommy with an odd look.

“You’re explaining that later,” Techno whispers.

“I don’t know—”

“Then you’re telling me why you think.”

Tommy stays quiet and keeps walking.

Eventually they reach a small building on the sides of the streets. It’s an older building, with vines and ivy creeping up the side of it but in retrospect most buildings on Redding Street also have flowers and greenery crawling up it, slowly overtaking the broken remains that were once left here.

The apartment they approach has vines almost as... a curtain, and half of a rooting door leaning up against the wall. Tommy looks at it, as TapL brushes the curtain of vines away and Tommy follows in after TapL and Techno.

Inside the room it is rather... normal, it's a brick room which means it's colder inside than outside but not cold enough to make any of them shiver. Faintly Tommy can smell hot chocolate and some sorta candle.

In the middle of the room is a large mahogany meeting table, and a couple of chairs thrown about the table. Also in the table is a collection of knives and scratches from where Tommy assumed many knives landed, which is always interesting.

There's scratches and dents in the wood that give it character and story. Pinned onto the table with a knife is a map of... something, but before Tommy can get a good look at it TapL rips the knife out of the table and folds up the map.

He turns to shoot Tommy a dirty look.

The map was rather bland... there wasn't actually that much on it, it looked like some sort of street that Tommy didn't recognise much to his disgust.

It feels vaguely familiar though... and that terrifies Tommy more than anything else TapL could say or do.

Tommy stays quiet, and Techno takes a seat.

A moment later TapL takes a seat, and Tommy has the sneaking suspicion it was just because Techno took a seat and he doesn't appear to be one to be overlooked. They're fighting in the most childish way possible and Tommy can appreciate that.

Techno sighs and rolls his eyes, and TapL responds by sticking out his tongue at the man in what must be a very mature gesture, which is honestly really fucking funny when Tommy

thinks about it.

Two grown adults trying to have a war over... well nothing, which seems very fitting for the minimal things that Tommy knows about the pair of them.

Someone enters through one of the side doors and Tommy has to stop himself from moving or making a noise because *holy shit* that is a blue hybrid if Tommy has ever seen one.

The man has... flaky black skin which might actually be bone now that he thinks about it—and pure white eyes, no iris, no pupil and Tommy truthfully has *no* idea how the fuck that works and he's not sure if he wants to know.

They wear a hood over his head which has some red on it, which is honestly quite a nice detail. It looks a bit like his Theseus hoodie apart from the fact it looks nothing like his Theseus hoodie.

TapL stands up like a complete chump.

Techno raises an eyebrow.

“It’s *respectful, Blade.*” TapL snaps.

“I’m not under his leadership,” Techno drawls, he grins as he says it and that seems to piss off TapL even more. “And even if I was—I am not standing up every time he enters a room.”

Tommy stands up.

Techno has honestly... never looked more betrayed than he does at that very moment.

TapL looks like he’s never experienced joy until that moment.

Bad sighs, before sitting down at one of the chair and they all sit down.

“So... this is...” Bad glances at TapL, “TapL I am asking you to leave this is a private affair.”

TapL’s mouth falls open.

But he stands up and leaves without much fanfare.

“You are Theseus?” Bad says, he keeps his voice low just in case and there’s a certain scratchiness to his voice that Tommy didn’t notice before. Like something happened to his throat.

Tommy looks at Techno with wide eyes, “You told him?”

“I trust him.”

“Well I might not! You can’t just decide who I can and can’t trust.”

“He’s the only one who can help you with your powers,” Techno says, “That... that I know at least.”

Bad nods, “Your secret is safe with me Theseus, from Elysium— from anyone else, I swear on it.”

Tommy nods slowly, still looking a Techno with narrowed eyes. “Okay... so— now what.”

“What exactly happened?” Bad says, “With your... power development.”

Tommy takes a deep breath, closing his eyes just for a moment as he tries to steady himself to very little success.

“I— I was mad. I was scared— I was upset, and then... this guy— went to fuckin’ stab Techno and I— that’s fucked, and I got angry and then his eyes started glowing red and he went completely still and I— I don’t know what I did.”

Bad nods.

“Tommy... have you ever influenced electricity?”

“Yes. Uh— I fried someone’s phone once, apparently took out a bunch of cameras one time — and another time. So yeah...”

Bad leans back in his seat slightly, crossing his arms. “Are you aware of how memories work?”

“Uh— kinda?”

“Basically,” Bad glances at Techno, and Techno nods. “Memories are kind of just electrical pulses in your brain, firing neurons. So if those right neurons are activated you can basically make people... re-remember stuff.”

Tommy stares at him, mouth open. “Wait— could I brainwash people because that’s really cool.”

Techno sighs.

Bad looks... concerned, it's hard to tell the expressions on his face but Tommy can feel the general aura of disappointment as Tommy just gives an awkward smile. "You have to take this seriously, you could easily kill people with this."

Tommy's smile drops.

"Huh?"

"You could send someone into cardiac arrest, or trap them in their own mind, or make them think their body is giving up on them..." Bad trails off for a moment too long, "This is serious."

Tommy slides down in his seat a little more. "I could've killed someone for... years."

"Probably not," Techno chimes in, "Your powers have been developing like crazy recently, this is most likely a recent development— so technically it's probably a relatively new thing."

Tommy just looks at the table then up at Bad.

"How— why are you trained to do this? Why can you help me?"

"I believe we both have some form of memory manipulation, Theseus," Bad says slowly, as if he's almost unsure of the words. "Your power set is very rare— I haven't met anyone with such a broad range of powers."

Tommy just stares.

"The closest I've found is— I don't even know, they probably destroyed themselves with their powers."

“Where are you from?” Tommy asks, “Your accent is wrong.”

“Prime district,” Bad says, “I was adopted out as a child and then some lab decided they would test experimental drugs on a ten-year-old because kids recover from hybrid transformations better than adults.”

“Huh?”

Bad sighs, he glances at Techno who looks rather confused and helpless about the entire situation.

“Blue did not just come from anywhere, Theseus,” Bad says, he stands up and starts pacing. “It is not like it showed up overnight, it was supposed to be so they could— make the ideal heroes. You’re too young to know this probably.”

“It was to *what*— ”

“Ideal heroes,” Bad crosses his arms and keeps on pacing up and down. “They wanted— needed more heroes, effective ones. Nobody stopped the tower—”

“The tower?” Techno yells, before glancing around. “They enabled this?”

Bad looks so tired, “Where do you think they conducted these experiments? There are basements upon basements underneath the tower... I don’t think any of the current heroes know about it, Philza might think it’s a rumour.”

“Current?” Tommy asks slowly, “What do you mean current?”

“Well... when he was an active hero they called him The Captain— but a new hero came through shortly after and was assigned that name so research would be harder. Now he’s called Sparklez... he was one of the last heroes to hide his identity from the greater public and committee and— he went missing.”

Techno nods, “Everyone knows about Sparklez,” he explains looking at Tommy. “We’re warned about him, he lost it a little, from the pressure or something and then he turned on the committee and became a villain.”

Bad looks horrified, “Techno—”

Techno looks over at Bad with confused eyes, “What do you mean?”

“Sparklez was taken to Pandora’s...” Bad says slowly, “He was threatening to release the truth about blue and the hero committee in general, about the corruption and— he almost did.”

Techno looks like his entire world has been turned on his head.

Bad sighs, “He was from Logstedchire,” he gives Tommy a sad look. “He’s dead now.”

“He’s dead?” Tommy whispers.

“Yeah,” Bad says quietly, “Dead. That’s what they do to heroes who dare to speak out— or break their public image or anything,” his eyes land on Techno.

Tommy feels cold all over.

He can’t describe it apart from a numb coldness that takes over his whole body as he stares at the table. The dents and scratches in it, the numbness reaches to his hands and his fingers feel cold. Freezing almost.

How. Dare. They.

His breathing speeds up, he can feel it speed up, with a sort of fury that's lurking behind it all. Very calm, and calculated.

The tower... the heroes... someone did this. Someone did this to them. People worked on this, people worked on this drug that was supposed to change the world and instead limited it — and then they used it to isolate Logstedchire from the rest of L'Manberg even more. Even more—

They created a life ruining drug and then— then they fucking... they fucking used it as a political tool, the reason heroes couldn't patrol in Logstedchire— the reason that Tommy's parents were like that, the reason his life— and so many other people's is in shambles.

Both Bad and Techno are looking at Tommy with concerned eyes as Tommy opens and closes his mouth, trying to think of something to say but he *can't*. There's so much anger— mourning almost at what could have been different.

“Tommy—” Techno says carefully.

Tommy turns to look at him. “The Tower did this,” there are tears in his eyes that might be shed, but he's not sure. “Your workplace, fucking did this. To you. To— so many people in my life.”

“Tommy—”

Tommy turns to look at Bad, he feels too calm despite the ice that is slowly taking over his body. “Did they drop blue in Logstedchire on purpose?”

Bad looks at Techno, then at the table and finally he manages to meet eyes with Tommy. Tommy's expression does not waiver and he looks at Bad with the same coldness he is feeling.

"Yeah..." Bad says quietly, it's barely a whisper. "The president needed to separate himself from Logstedchire, he didn't know how to fix the problems there. So he said it was too far gone."

Tommy looks down at the table, his breathing is getting even faster and he can barely think. He can't think much beyond the... whatever feeling this is, and he doesn't want it to ever overtake him again.

But right now, he is angry.

He is so angry.

Tommy stands up, slamming his hands on the table and it creaks in a dangerous way. "They fucking destroyed lives for a political excuse? They killed countless— they're the reasons I'd see dead bodies in the street to just fuckin' isolate an already broken community more? This is the reason that heroes don't patrol? Or the police are more useless in Logstedchire than usual and gangs ran the district for... as long as I can fuckin' remember. Some of my first memories are fights outside of my house! Because some stupid old man decided we were worth giving up on, *I* and thousands of other children like me just *had* to be given up on?"

"Tommy—" Techno tries again, but it's weaker this side.

"Elysium—"

"Are terrorists!" Tommy yells, "They are terrorists and they kill and they hurt and they should not resort to violence. An eye for an eye only makes everyone go blind."

“Everything else has been tried, Tommy,” Bad whispers. “You think a district wide movement was the first step? There have been peaceful protests, there has been so much fighting and attempted diplomacy, sometimes things have to be sorted with violence.”

“Then stop trying to kill my friends!” Tommy yells back, “Stop trying to kill my friends, they don’t know— it’s not their fault. Fundy didn’t do anything, he’s nineteen for fuck’s sake.”

Bad just looks at him.

Tommy hates the calmness Bad has now, he looks like he’s had this fight a million times before.

Judging by the way he glances at Techno, he has.

“Kill the people in charge, the hero committee, the president— fucking Techno do it again, don’t miss this time.”

Techno also looks far too calm, “Killing anyone will not change anything.”

“Well it will to me!” Tommy yells, his voice hurts from the screaming. “Someone has to pay — someone has to pay for how much they’ve fucked up my life on purpose! Someone does! Or else then what? Do I just live with this for the rest of my life? Do I wake up every morning knowing the bastards that ruined everything get to breathe while the rest of us are left drowning under *their* decisions?”

Techno looks so tired... he looks so sad. “Yes, Tommy, that’s the way it is.”

“Well fuck that!” Tommy yells again, “It’s not the way it is! It’s the way it is because you agreed on that. I never agreed on that! I never agreed to this, I want revenge. I want people to hurt half as much as I did.”

“We know... Tommy,” Bad says and Tommy whirls back around to face him. “I know. Trust me, you might be in a room with two people who understand the most. That’s what Elysium does... they want revenge on your friends, they need *someone* to hurt and they are the easiest to reach, to hurt.”

Tommy just stares at Bad for a long moment, “It’s not fair.”

“I know.”

“They deserve to be hurt.”

“I know,” Bad says, and he sounds... so, so tired. “I know.”

Tommy looks at Techno.

They both just look at each other for a long moment. Tommy isn’t quite sure what to say and it appears Techno is not either.

“I wish you didn’t miss your shot at the president.”

Techno manages a huff, “Sometimes— me too kid. Would’ve been worth Pandora’s or whatever the fuck they tried to throw at me. To watch him die... hopefully slowly, that would have been worth the world and then some.”

Tommy sighs.

The anger subsides.

He hates that it does, he wants to be angry forever. A part of him might be angry forever, but right now... he can not change the past, he can not change the future until he changes first.

He sits down and crosses his arms. “I’m okay now— well... as okay as you can be.”

Bad nods, before looking at Techno.

“I can not believe they told you that Sparklez went mad.”

“Can’t you?”

“I can not believe none of the heroes talked about what a lie that was,” Bad continues, “People knew him, they trusted him... and they really thought that he just... went against all of his friends rather than got bumped off.”

Techno shrugs, “Question the agency too much and you find out what happens.”

There’s a pause in the conversation where Bad is thinking and Tommy is... well rather confused, to be frank.

Bad opens his mouth and then closes it.

Before he manages to finally get the words out.

“I am frankly surprised they haven’t bumped you off yet.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You have public connections to vigilantes, you’ve outlived your use within the organisation. You’re blued, and unable to control your strength. You’ve lost the usefulness you once held, they’ve killed over less.”

Tommy looks at Techno.

Techno looks... well surprisingly calm. "Killing me would start a chain reaction. There are more heroes and we are closer than we were when Sparklez was in action— if I went missing or to Pandora's I have people fighting for me. Phil would burn down the world for me, and Wilbur would throw it all on its head." Techno looks at Tommy and he manages a brighter smile, "And I reckon this one here would tear the world apart if there was a chance I could be saved, I'm not scared."

Bad smiles, just a small thing that Tommy almost misses completely.

"Well," Bad says, "It appears you know what you're doing, just as resourceful as you were in the rings?"

"Made powerful allies," Techno says, and he's grinning so wide it looks like it hurts. "I think you got good at that too, somebody has to."

"Okay that's great," Tommy says, "Well it's not— because turns out the heroes are the reason blue exists and that is not amazing— nor is the copious amounts of corruption or silencing. But what the fuck does this have to do with my powers?"

"Theseus," Bad looks at him, and Tommy feels uncomfortable with the pupil-less gaze landing on him. "Have you ever been blued? Whether there was some twisted second wave of experiments or times were tough or—"

"No," Tommy shakes his head.

Bad hums, before walking around a bit more. "Okay— so you have a very powerful power set, that's not unheard of... it's rare but possible without interference."

“He might just be a main character,” Techno deadpans, “I mean... he has powers that are like plot relevant. Whenever he needs something then... boom, suddenly his powers can do it.”

Bad just gives Techno a look. “We are not diagnosing him with main character syndrome.”

“But we *could*. ”

“Why am I being diagnosed?”

“Because,” Techno says, “Something’s clearly wrong with you.”

“I think my wrongness is unrelated to my powers,” Tommy deadpans.

Techno pauses for a moment, mouth half open as the cogs in his head work overtime to make sense of Tommy. “Oh yeah... that... yeah.”

Tommy rolls his eyes and looks back at Bad. “Okay— my power origins don’t matter I just have them, dunno why, dunno how— but like... how the fuck are we going to train me to fix this?”

Bad stops in his tracks, before looking at Tommy then at Techno.

“You said it happened when you were really mad, right?”

Techno gets up out of his chair, a certain level of distrust in his eyes.

“Yeah...” Tommy says.

Techno starts approaching Bad, he probably has a weapon or something but he truthfully has no way of really knowing.

Bad looks at Techno, before looking at Tommy again, something shifts in the air and Tommy for some reason is up out of the chair and on his feet before he really realises anything is wrong.

“Bad—” Techno goes to say.

A hand shoots out and Bad taps Techno’s forehead.

Techno hits the ground and Tommy reaches out to run to him.

“Nope.” Bad says.

Techno’s eyes turn red and Tommy turns to look at Bad with wide, open eyes.

Tommy takes a few steps towards Techno, and Bad shakes his head.

“I’m not letting Techno free until you figure it out.”

“What the fuck?” Tommy shrieks, looking between Techno and Bad. “Stop it! I can’t control it! Stop it—”

“I’m not,” Bad says easily.

“Let him go!” Tommy yells, a spark forms in his hand and Tommy can not be bothered— or doesn’t want to stop the spark from growing a bit and bit bigger in his hand as he glares at Bad.

Techno's basically kneeling on the ground, his eyes are almost... glowing red and staring directly ahead. He doesn't look like he's in pain, but Techno's the sorta guy who knows how to hide pain and Tommy's the sorta guy who knows what hiding pain is like.

He looks at Techno for a bit longer, at the blank expression before managing to tear his eyes away from his brother and back to Bad.

"What are you doing?" Tommy is almost screaming now, there's a desperation seeping into his tone that he didn't know existed, he can't remember the last time that his voice held this much emotion. "Stop it right now! I will—"

What *will* he do?

If he hurts Bad too badly that might permanently fuck with Techno's mind and that is not something Tommy wants on his conscience, he stares. His mouth is half open and he's horrified to look at Techno.

"Stop it!" Tommy yells, because that's about all he can do. He's a bit pressed to do anything else but beg Bad, he can't control his powers— and he can't fight his way through this one, he genuinely doesn't know what to do and that fucking terrifies him. "Bad— that's not fair— what are you even making him see?"

"All of his worst memories," Bad responds, he doesn't break eye-contact with Tommy as he says it. "All of the worst memories he's ever had, those are floating around that little muffin's mind. You can make it stop—"

"I can't!" Tommy yells, "I can't— I can't control my powers."

"No time to learn like now," Bad says. His tone is far too calm for Tommy's liking, it's level and even and Tommy wishes more than anything that he could find some sort of weapon and repeatedly drive it into Bad's head. "Come on Tommy," Bad says, "I know you can do this."

Tears sting Tommy's eyes, and he hates that they sting his eyes because he can't control them. He doesn't want to cry. But he doesn't want to be helpless more, something twisted wraps around his throat, making it harder to breathe and his heart starts racing even more as he looks between Techno and Bad.

He doesn't want to hurt Techno—

“Stop it,” Tommy manages over the lump in his throat.

He looks at the blank eyes of a brother, meeting his but unstaringly. Probably seeing his worst memories flashing in front of his eyes as Tommy sits here not sure what to do.

“Techno,” Tommy tries, trying to see any recognition in his brother's eyes. “Techno.”

“That won't work, Tommy,” Bad's tone is still *so* even, it's so level and controlled and Tommy hates that with every inch of his being and then some and then some. “You have to break the control I have.”

“I'll kill you,” Tommy whispers.

He means it.

He... is horrified to know that he means it. He means every word of that and more, he would be so fine with killing Bad right now.

That horrifies him perhaps the most.

When did he... get so okay with violence?

Tommy looks back at Techno, crouching down so their eyes are at the same level. He wants to say something, say anything.

“Tech—”

“Tommy.” Techno says.

His eyes are still far away— he’s not *seeing* Tommy.

But— one of his worst memories, one of the worst things that Bad could make him see. Has... Tommy. Tommy must be a fucking key part of that memory for his name to be the first and only word that Techno has said.

Tommy has felt rage before.

He has felt grief before.

At this moment he can not remember what any of those things were like the previous times. Everything clouds his judgement, his thoughts, a red hot anger bursts through his veins and he feels cold all over. It’s a mix of grief and rage and he’s not sure which he hates to think about more.

It’s freezing, this sort of rage, it settles against his veins and in his stomach as he stares at the man in front of him. The man that is hurting his brother more than Tommy will understand, he doesn’t want to understand, he just needs to make it right. It is that simple and that complicated, he needs his brother to be okay.

Everyone says that anger is red, it’s a warm colour, it’s fury and passion and filled with life and feelings and...

Tommy doesn't feel that anymore, it's a dull, but still tragic sort of anger settling in his stomach as his breathing evens out but his heart starts thumping in the front of his chest with a pounding feeling that threatens to break through the front of his rib cage.

He thinks... he's too mad to think of the passion of it, of the fury.

Anger right now is blue... but Tommy's powers are red, and if Tommy can not be red then something in this Prime forsaken room will be.

The warmth that came from before is slowly sucking out of the room, and Tommy doesn't know if that's literal or metaphorical and he's not sure if he wants to know.

Tommy slowly turns his head so he's looking at Bad.

A burst of red anger builds up inside of him seeing Techno again. It's warm, it's hot, he feels warm all over and he opens and closes his mouth, floundering as he thinks of something to say that will match the intensity of the emotions swirling around inside him.

Eventually, after what feels like years but is in reality merely moments, he opens his mouth.

For a moment the anger dissipates inside of Tommy, the red rage bursting through his heart calms down completely. His breathing evens out for just a moment and his heart stops thumping in his chest so hard it threatens to explode.

There's a deathly calm about it.

He tilts his head, and smiles at Bad.

"You fuckin' want me to control my powers?" Tommy whispers, and the words are tied with electricity.

He can feel his fingertips tingling and buzzing from the electricity of it all.

Both of them can feel the electricity in the air, that might be anger but it's something deadly. It's almost poisonous and Tommy will poison them both if need be.

In reality, Tommy would assume that the powers he have to be as loud and out there as his, as loud and screaming about what he's doing. He assumes that his powers are a part of him, when he is mad they are mad, when he is sad they are sad.

That assumption may be true in some cases, but in this one... it is not.

There is no flash of red.

No nothing that matches the fury swirling around inside of him.

Just a silent simmering rage.

Some sort of swirling red energy dances around Bad's head.

Bad does not look scared.

Tommy is not sure how he's supposed to feel about that.

Then Bad hits the floor.

Really hits.

Tommy ignores him and runs to Techno, landing back on the ground in front of him and meeting his eyes to see any sort of resemblance in them. He can't find much, but there's something there.

The red dissipates out of Techno's eyes quickly, back to their usual colour and Tommy opens his mouth to say something—

How is he supposed to approach what just happened?

“Well,” Techno says, “That was rather enjoyable—” he looks around the room, eyes landing on the person who is currently on the floor and Tommy did not check on like... at all. “Why is Bad on the floor?”

“He—” Tommy gestures at his own head.

“Yeah...” Techno says slowly, as if he's not quite sure what Tommy means.

“Worst memories?” Tommy manages through a lump in his throat.

“Huh?”

“He said— he made you see—”

Techno's mouth falls open, “Oh shit,” he moves so he's next to Bad, basically picking him up from off the ground.

Tommy looks at Bad, who has red energy flying around his head.

His eyes are a dangerous shade of red and Tommy can't do anymore but watch as Techno's eyes widen in fear.

He doesn't look at Tommy, "Tommy— what the *fuck* did you do?"

"I thought he was hurting you!"

"Why would you assume that?"

"He said he was!" Tommy yells back, he shuffles back a little, away from Techno and Bad. "I — I thought he was making you see your worst memories, he said he was doing that. I didn't want that. You don't deserve that— I panicked and he wasn't fucking helping me!"

Techno ignores Tommy, and Tommy tries to pretend that it doesn't sting as much as it does.

He shuffles back even more, hugging his knees to his chest as he watches Bad and Techno.

Techno manages to prop Bad against the wall in a rather efficient manner. He then crouches in front of Bad, trying to see anything that notices him in his eyes, mirroring what Tommy was doing with Techno a few moments before.

He mumbles a few curses under his breath as he moves backwards and looks at Tommy. There's something accusatory in his gaze, and Tommy wilts underneath it. He tries to bury himself into the wall.

See.

The thing is.

He *knows* that Techno won't hurt him, he *knows* that Techno is nice and would never dream of doing that. He knows that Techno would never even think of it, the logical part of his brain knows all of this—

He still pushes his back into the wall hoping he will dissolve into it.

Techno's focus changes from Bad to Tommy almost completely and he turns to look at Tommy.

Tommy tries to push himself into the wall even more.

“Tommy...” Techno says gently, “I’m— I’m not mad at you, okay? I’d never be mad at you for something you can’t control, okay? I’m just scared and I’m sorry I yelled.”

Tommy just stares at him.

His heart is still beating in his throat and it feels like he’s going to choke on something that isn’t there. “I’m sorry— I’m sorry— I’m so sorry.”

“Kid, kid,” Techno says gently, he leaves Bad against the wall before shuffling towards Tommy. “It’s okay. Okay? We’ll figure this out, neither of us are dumb, we can do this. I need you to try and calm down though, okay? Deep breaths. Okay?”

Tommy takes a deep breath.

“Yup... that’s good,” Techno glances back at Bad. “Just keep breathing okay? I’m not mad at you, you were egged on and can’t control your powers on a good day. It would be so hard for me to be mad at you.”

Tommy nods.

Focus on breathing.

Focus on breathing, he can do that. He's basically a pro at breathing, it's something he does all the time. In and out, in and out. He's really good at that, he should get an award for how good at breathing he is. He deserves an oscar for it. He's just built that differently. He takes a deep breath and ignores the way that his chest aches at it.

He's okay.

This is fine. He's fine.

"Bad," Techno says gently, shaking him. "Jesus— where is TapL?"

Almost like some mystical power intervened, at that moment TapL pushes the vines aside. He has a few more people behind him and Tommy doesn't know any of them, but Techno must because his eyes show the sheer relief he must be feeling.

"What the fuck—" TapL says reaching for the gun on his side.

Tommy takes a deep breath and this one doesn't hurt. Okay, progress.

"What did you do?" TapL yells.

"Memory entrapment," Techno's words stumble over each other. "Like he would in the ring — I don't remember what to do, what the fuck do we do?"

TapL and someone else land on the floor next to Techno with worry on their faces.

Techno looks at Tommy.

“Tommy...”

“Yeah?” Tommy manages, “I’m okay—”

“Okay,” Techno looks at everyone else in the room. “Do you know what to do?”

Okay. Okay. Okay. How can he fix this? Last time this was fixed with him passing out, and it’s really hard to pass out on command unless he asks someone to strangle him and that’s not something that he really wants.

This is fine. This is fine, he can figure something out.

Tommy manages to kinda... scoot over, and he looks at all the adults panicking about as much as he is, and realises this must be... well pretty fuckin’ serious all things considered. Tommy pauses, reaching forwards for Bad.

His hand lands on Bad’s forehead.

If fear and anger triggers... whatever this is, then surely something happy would get rid of it? That’s how that works right? He needs to calm himself down, with deep breaths and whatever else calms people down— maybe anxiety meds, those would be really good right about now actually.

For a moment Tommy struggles to say any of his thoughts, they all get stuck in his throat and he looks at Techno.

“Okay,” TapL says, “I need to know what is actually going on. Otherwise we won’t have a way to fix this.”

“I did this,” Tommy mumbles, and is met with several confused and... scared eyes. Tommy ignores the terrified and horrified eyes that land on him and instead takes a deep breath.

He catches eyes with Techno who gives him a nod of affirmation.

“I did this with my janky fuckin’ powers and I don’t know how to stop it—”

“Okay, okay,” the person who is not TapL says, but clearly it is important... Tommy thinks he was in the ring? Hence why he rushed forward with TapL. “We used to have to calm down Bad, because he had the grip on his own mind. So we need to calm down the person who has the grip on someone’s mind.”

“So we gotta calm the kid down?” TapL says, “Techno how do we calm the kid down?”

“He looks pretty fuckin’ calm to me!” Someone else yells, but they’re irrelevant so everyone ignores them.

“Okay,” Techno takes a deep breath, “Tommy... can you be calm?”

“How is telling me to be calm going to make me calm down?” Tommy yells, and he suddenly feels a lot less calm than he did a couple of seconds ago. “Now this person’s... sanity relies on me being able to calm down, how is that going to calm me down.”

“I can make him sleep,” TapL cracks his knuckles, “That might work—”

“Do not knock out Tommy,” Techno snaps. “Okay, okay... give me like three seconds to think. Calming down Tommy... how the fuck do we calm down Tommy.”

Bad makes a noise that can not be good.

“Purpled!” Techno announces and is met with several weird looks. Techno scrambles to find his phone, which he eventually manages before clicking furiously.

He walks over to Tommy and helps him off the floor.

Techno leads him into a side room, it’s just a... very standard looking kitchen. With a white fridge, black tiles that are slightly chipped and wooden looking counters.

The phone rings in the silence.

“If Tommy’s in jail again I’ll kill you—”

“Hello to you too,” Techno says, “Okay no pressure—”

“Great way to start any conversation.”

“I need to calm down,” Tommy blurts out, “Power— bullshit, gotta, calm down.”

“So you called me?”

“Yeah...” Techno trails off, “You’re Tommy’s best friend, right? You’ve been together through thick and thin and whatever else this fuckery of a life has thrown at you. I can not think of anyone else better.”

Purpled sighs, *“Okay... turn the phone off speaker and leave Tommy alone.”*

Techno hands the phone towards Tommy, before approaching the door, where he pauses for a moment. He hesitates before walking back out into the meeting room, closing the door softly behind him.

Tommy turns the phone off speaker and holds it against his ear.

“So...” Purpled says, *“How are ya doin’?”*

“Not amazingly.”

“Yeah... I suspected,” Purpled mutters and there’s a bit of humour in his voice. *“Y’know you’ve been a pent up human like... since I’ve known you, it’s actually kinda impressive. You’re just always nervous.”*

Tommy laughs, before starting to walk around the kitchen. He tucks his phone between his cheek and shoulder as he walks around looking for nothing in particular.

“Guess it’s the undiagnosed anxiety.”

“Holy fuck did you just admit that you have anxiety? They said this day would not come, holy shit.”

Tommy laughs and rolls his eyes, “I am fully aware of the many problems I have.”

“The hero complex? The... worrying coping methods, the anger issues that I think you might have now that I think about it. The anxiety attacks— the PTSD that you for sure have... the just general trauma. I could go on.”

“Okay this is not an insulting me session.”

“Kinda is,” Purpled mutters. *“I mean you can insult me back if you want to... I have many thoughts all the time. Guess what I found out?”*

“What?”

“You know Teegan from accounting.”

“Yes I know Teegan from accounting.”

“And Amy— she’s also security.”

“I know Amy from security.”

“She, and Amy are like... a thing.”

“Good for them!”

“No, no, no,” Purpled says and Tommy can feel the excitement in his voice. “Because Teegan is married—”

“She is not!”

“She is!” Purpled yells into the receiver, “She is super married and like... it’s a messy situation all around. Wanna hear my theory?”

“Always.”

“Okay, so I think that Teegan is in the middle of a divorce, and then boom sparks flew with Amy and so now they’re in this awkward middle ground.”

“That is the stupidest thing I have ever heard.”

“It is not!” Purpled argues, “Like— I am sure Teegan is cheating on someone and like... why would you do that?”

“Uh... maybe she’s closeted?”

“No!” Purpled says, “She has a wife! So she’s cheating on her wife with one of my coworkers like, am I supposed to just tell Amy that Teegan has a wife?”

“Wait, how do you know that Teegan has a wife?”

Purpled pauses.

Tommy hopes his judgement can transfer through the screen.

“Purpled.”

“Okay I may have gone through the records, but it was fishy okay! And I am nosy! What else was I supposed to do?”

“Not go snooping?”

“Too late, so like... do I tell Amy about this or not.”

“Morally you should.”

“Well fuck morals.”

“Tell her! It’s not right if you know and are actively not telling her.”

Purpled sighs, *“Fine. Why do you have all of this morality now? Like what the fuck is wrong with you?”*

Tommy just laughs, “You fucker—”

“You let morals get in the way too much.”

“Oh okay... be right back I’ll fix that up real quickly.”

“Cool!” Purpled says, and he laughs. *“It’s been a hot second since we’ve spoken like this? Hasn’t it?”*

Tommy manages a smile, one that feels... real and like him. He smiles a bit wider. *“Yeah. It’s nice.”*

Tommy and Purpled may be... well probably kilometres away from each other. But Tommy can feel the smile over the phone and Tommy’s smile probably matches his own considering how bright he’s smiling.

There’s general chatter outside, and Tommy pauses. “I think we’re good now...”

“Oh...” Purpled says. *“I’m glad though... it seems like it’s been a rather stressful time for you and that’s never good.”*

“I know,” Tommy says, *“I— turns out my powers can like... make you re-live memories? It’s super fucked and I only do it when I’m angry. It’s like... kinda odd not gonna lie, apparently brains are just electricity so if I can manipulate that.”*

Purpled is quiet for a moment.

“Y’know... sometimes when I was talking to you, I’d remember things mid conversation.”

“Huh?”

“I dunno like one time we were talkin’ and then I remembered all the shit Punz did. Or like—I remembered my training better. I’m not saying it was your doing, I’m saying that... maybe this power development isn’t new?”

“I— dunno,” Tommy mutters. “I’ve never done it to the level I have in the last couple of days.”

“True, true,” Purpled says, “Well... we’ll figure this out.”

“We?” There’s a note of humour in his voice. “Ah yes... Purpled, who knows so well about my really specific power set.”

“Me and you,” the same humour is missing in Purpled’s voice, it’s more serious, it sounds more like the beginning of a promise than a jab. *“Against it all, no matter what. Okay? There is nothing you could do to make me hate you, or not drop everything.”*

“Are you okay?”

“I’m just worried about you.”

There’s a heavy silence that weighs down.

“That was enough emotional vulnerability for today,” Purpled decides, and yeah that’s probably a fair assessment. “Good luck with... your powers I guess. Please don’t break anyone.”

“Okay.”

“Bye, love you— wait.”

Tommy laughs, “Love you too Purps.”

“Ew.”

“Don’t be weird.”

“I am being weird. We’re being too emotional and nice to each other.”

“Goodbye, Purpled,” Tommy says through laughter.

He hangs up and sighs, the smile stays on his face a bit longer than he’ll ever admit to, before opening the door and poking his head out.

Sure enough, Bad seems... well better now, he’s looking around and having things like vision and seeing and rather important shit. Tommy looks over at Techno, Techno gives him a nod and gestures him over.

Tommy holds Techno’s phone in his hand and approaches quietly.

Several pairs of eyes flick up to them, Bad’s included.

Well Tommy thinks Bad's eyes flick up to him, he doesn't really have a way of knowing that for sure. Since the whole... lack of pupils, but his head does turn to look up at Tommy.

Bad manages a smile, "Impressive, especially for someone without training."

"I am so sorry—"

Bad gives him a long look, "You weren't at the time, and I will not hold that against you. It was my intention to cause that reaction."

"Well it worked at least?" Tommy tries, he crouches because he feels a bit left out standing up while everyone else is at least a bit closer to the floor. "Uh— what did you see?"

"The experiments," Bad says.

"I'm so sorry—"

Bad shrugs, the movement seems to cause him some discomfort and Tommy in truth has no clue how to feel about that. It's a bit depressing if he's being quite frank.

"Okay. We need to get that under control," Bad says, he starts attempting the art of standing up and he doesn't do that amazingly. His hands shake and he almost falls back down, TapL basically catches him. "I'm fine, I'm fine," he doesn't snap, it just seems more like a fact and Tommy finds himself believing the strength in his voice.

Bad gets up by himself and stands there for a moment before taking a careful step. "Okay. I am going to ask you muffinheads to leave, because we need to get that under control and it will not be pretty."

TapL pauses for a moment, as everyone else files out the door.

“You too,” Techno says, “Bad likes me more than you.”

“That’s not true!” TapL yells.

Prime, they really are like children.

“It is!” Techno says, “I am Bad’s favourite child.”

“I don’t like either of you,” Bad deadpans, “Techno I will make you leave.”

“He will turn this car around!” Tommy adds.

That gets a laugh out of all of them, which fuck yeah, Tommy is hilarious he deserves that laugh. Okay the joke wasn’t like— that funny but it was still good. Not everything has to be amazingly funny to be funny.

TapL rolls his eyes and leaves, flipping off Techno as he does so.

“Language!”

“I am not speaking,” TapL deadpans, making eye contact with Techno as he reverses out of the room. “But Techno, you’re a fuckin’ bitch—”

“Language!” Bad yells again.

Both parties in this face off ignore him.

Techno glances at Bad before looking at TapL. “Oi, TapL.”

“What?”

“Fuck you.”

“Oh you motherfu—”

“Language!” Tommy and Bad screech this time.

Techno pauses, before turning around to Tommy. “Tommy... you swear more than TapL and I combined.”

“Do not. You have no proof.”

TapL leaves and Techno glares at the doorway.

Prime, really the resemblance between Purpled and himself is almost... uncanny here.

Bad sighs, “Okay,” he looks at Tommy. “We need to get this under control because that was not good at all.”

Tommy nods, taking a seat and Techno sits down next to him.

“Right... so first of all I’m calling your power mind limbo,” Bad paces back and forth, clearly thinking rather hard about this entire thing. “Even more so than mine, unless you gain

control over it, I think you'll keep making people relive their worst memories and there's no telling what that could do to someone with prolonged effect."

"What do you mean?" Techno asks.

"I mean," Bad explains, "That it lasted... maybe a couple of minutes for me? What if Tommy couldn't calm down for an hour, or even longer? That person would be reliving their worst memories systematically and that will mess with your brain composition, it's like years worth of trauma are dumped on someone at once. It could permanently alter brain structure in an incredibly short amount of time."

"That is... terrifying," Tommy says.

"Yup." Bad says, "Hence why we need for you to gain control over it— this isn't like other aspects of your powers. The brain is incredible delicate, easy to mould and shape and—"

"Fuck up?"

Bad winces at the swearing, but he nods. "Yes. It is easy to mess up, it is incredibly easy to mess up."

Tommy nods, "Okay... so... how do I control this fuckery?"

"By controlling your anger."

Techno raises a hand.

"Yes, Techno."

“What if it’s for any strong emotion, like fear— like if he’s really scared it might happen. Then what would you do with that? Anger is a lot easier to control than fear, there are vigilantes who can kick start your fight or flight responses, if Tommy’s response is fight then he could... well fuck this up.”

Bad pauses, “Well then... we need to teach him how to break people out of it first, then we can try figuring out what exactly can cause it.”

“Okay, okay, okay,” Tommy says, “Let’s take... several steps back if I’m being honest. How am I meant to deal with this and easily? I can’t control putting people in that state, so I can’t control taking people out of it.”

Techno and Bad look at each other.

There’s a knowing glance between them and Tommy has *no* clue how to feel about it, but it’s not overly positive feelings.

“Tommy, what’s something that makes you really angry?”

“Or scared.”

“Uh— Wilbur... finding out I’m Theseus? Being arrested? Uh... the recent revelation about blue and it’s formation which I think I moved on way quickly from because what the everloving fuck is that—”

“So blue,” Bad says, he snorts slightly. “Funnily enough that was also what I used when I was learning to control it. So... the existence of blue in general makes you mad, right? Especially it’s origin.”

“Yes.”

“Now... let yourself get mad about that. Think about everything that ruined for you, think about the people you’ve lost and the cost of that. Think about all of that and how unfair it is and then you direct that anger at an object.”

“Your brain?”

“My brain.”

“Okay...”

“Now, to snap both yourself and me out of it,” Bad says, “And this is important. You need to think of good memories.”

“Patronus?”

“Uh—” Bad looks at Techno, and Techno shrugs. “Sure. If that helps you understand it easier.”

“Right. Anger to snap someone into it, happy memories to snap someone out of it?”

Bad seems a bit relieved that Tommy got it... but like... in what universe would he just... not understand it, that’s almost funny to him. If his powers can fuck with people to the degree that Bad said, then of course he’s going to be listening.

Wait fuck— he’s gonna need a happy memory.

He can figure that out later.

“Tommy, before you do this, do you have a happy memory? Or something you can latch onto in your anger?” Bad says.

“Uh— I can’t really think of one right now?”

Techno sighs.

“Okay, well let’s think of one. Because I am not letting you do this without knowing how you’re going to stop it. Name something that makes you happy, a memory that you hold onto when you’re sad that makes you feel better.”

“I— don’t really have one,” Tommy eventually manages, “I mean— I have the first time Purpled and I met... yeah. I have meeting Floof or getting the job at the tower but that— that feels tainted now.”

Techno seems more upset than disappointed as he looks at Tommy. “Kid—”

“I mean— I have my family... they were nice until I got kicked out.”

“You got kicked out?” Techno squawks.

“It’s complicated,” Tommy says, “But those are good memories but... they kinda suck because I know they end, I know how that ends and it doesn’t end well.”

Bad just looks at him. “You have a really sad life kid.”

“Ya think?”

“There has to be something,” Techno says, “Like— anything.”

Tommy pauses, looking off into the distance trying to think. His parents are off the table, even for the few memories he has of them being nice, the bad far outweighs the good. He can't have anything with Wilbur because Wilbur... doesn't know him. Tubbo currently hates him, maybe Ranboo? Techno... he still feels way too much guilt around the warehouse to really find anything good there.

Purpled... Logstedchire... those things have been nothing but kind to him, sometimes they've hurt or been painful, but it's mostly positive. Neither of those things are tainted by any sort of bad that he can think of. He can think of the kindness and the quiet care, the sunsets, learning the alleyways, learning to fight and the faces of people who have been kinder than they will ever know and Tommy simply just can't thank them.

And Purpled... who came barreling into his life with the sort of care that only he has, understanding and not overbearing, kind and knew it. Tommy holds those things close to him.

The thing that stands out to him the most is... that morning not all that long ago. Where Purpled and Tommy just stood on the rooftops listening to the sounds and watching the sunset and just being home. That didn't end up badly.

Huh. His happy memory is Purpled, it appears.

He will die before he tells him that.

Tommy takes a deep breath before looking at Bad and he nods. "I have one."

"Is it the happiest you've ever been?"

"... I think so."

“Okay,” Bad takes a deep breath. “Then I trust you to do this. Let yourself get mad, let yourself be upset. Direct that energy.”

Tommy stands up, it feels right and he looks at Bad.

He thinks. And that is dangerous for the people around him. He thinks about everything that’s gone wrong in his life, he thinks about blue, he thinks about Tubbo’s newfound hatred, he thinks about the fear of Wilbur finding out he’s Theseus. He thinks about his parents—Prime, he thinks about his parents, for the first time in years he lets the anger surrounding them stew. He lets himself get upset, he lets himself mourn and get *mad* because it wasn’t fair. It was never fair, it’s never been fair— why does he get to suffer? Why does everything come back to him? Why is he thrown into a position where he needs and wants to save everyone, he’s a kid. He’s just a kid.

It isn’t fucking fair.

There’s a tension... he doesn’t know how to describe it apart from that, some sort of tension pulling on Tommy’s head. It’s not located anywhere in particular, it’s just there, some sort of pull or shove— or something violent.

And Bad goes down a moment later, his eyes glow red.

Tommy takes a deep breath.

Okay.

He can do this.

He thinks of Purpled... it might be a bit cliché but Purpled is his best friend, not Tubbo anymore— Purpled is his best friend, he’s just... there. He’s there, no matter what, no matter who, no matter why. He is just there, and Tommy never realised how much he needed that until he had someone at his side no matter what.

Purpled was just there—it was that easy, he was there no matter what shit shows Tommy was putting himself through. There however Tommy needs, willing to fight the entire world or just watch a crappy TV show with him.

Purpled is his best friend.

And that counts for both nothing and everything.

“Tommy—” Techno says, voice warning.

“He’s good,” Tommy says. He takes a step back.

He’s not sure how to explain it, how to explain the fact that he knew. The lack of tension in his brain seemed to dissipate, just sliding away into nothing.

A moment later Bad looks at him, with a slight smile on his face. “Well, Tommy,” Bad says and Tommy grins back at him. “It appears you have decent control.”

Tommy manages a full grin at that. “Thanks,” he looks over at Techno and Techno is giving a smile as well.

“Impressive Tommy,” Techno says, “You’re a fast learner.”

“Let’s hope so...” Tommy mutters.

“Just... if you know how to calm yourself down,” Bad says, “Then you will be okay.”

“Yeah... calm—I’m good at that,” Tommy mutters, not at himself, but more just in general which is something he’s okay with. “Thank you—” Tommy says, “For letting me fuck with your brain and memories and shit.”

“No issue,” Bad sounds like he means it. “Nice to meet you Theseus,” he holds out his hand and Tommy shakes it. “Now this is something that will stay within Redding Street— Elysium will not find out your civilian identity, I swear on it. As long as you two promise not to tell anything about any Elysium information you have found during your time here.”

“I swear,” Tommy says.

“I promise,” Techno adds.

Some of the tension in Bad’s shoulders slip slightly and Tommy is grateful that they could do that.

Tommy nods, “No one else who might know will tell?”

“No,” Bad shakes his head, “If they do, you will have my direct protection from anyone.”

Tommy nods, “Thank you.”

“And if either of you two,” Bad looks between Tommy and Techno. “*Ever* need protection, come here. We will keep you safe, Elysium— Redding, everyone. If things ever start to... go wrong, we will protect you. Both of you, and anyone else who you deem needs protection along with you.”

“I can not thank you enough for that,” Techno stands up, “That really means the world to us. It’s nice to know... that if things go wrong we have a place we can hide.”

“Of course,” Bad looks at Techno for a moment longer, “Have to look after all the fighting ring kids,” and his eyes dart over to Tommy. “And... whatever you may be, I am sorry we couldn’t protect you from whatever hurt you to begin with.”

Tommy is not going to cry— he is not going to cry—

He wipes away a few stray tears with the back of his sleeves.

So they leave.

It is that simple, they leave, Bad leads them to the exit part of the building and it opens. He gives Techno a hug and Tommy a nod.

Then they’re off.

They walk for silence for a few moments, words not happening until they get at least a block away from the fish factory.

Techno glances at him, concern in his eyes. “Tommy.”

“Techno.”

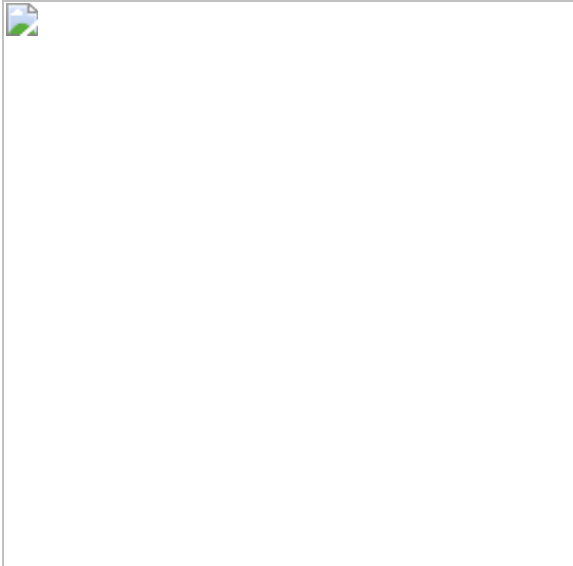
“Are you going to join Elysium?”

“No.”

But neither of them are quite sure if he means it.

“Let’s get a McFlurry,” Tommy mutters. “You owe me one of those anyway.”

Chapter End Notes



Chapter Summary:

- Hospital shenanigans including bedrock bros fluff, discduo fluff and some crimeboys doing many crimes.
- He gets home from the hospital and Tubbo is angsty. Tommy gets a call from Techno being like *“YOOWOOO WE CAN FIGURE OUT UR POWERS WITH THE HELP OF BAD”*
- They go to Reddings, Tommy gets caught up on the Reddings lore and we also find out that Barty ain’t Partyin’ no more.
- They try to figure out Tommy’s powers. Does not go amazingly, but now he has more control over the memory fuckery thing!
- Oh yeah and the end Techno is like “eeueueueue tommy are you going to join elysium?” and tommy says “NO” (y’know, like a liar /ref /hj)
- But overall this is a chill chapter and does NOT have to be this long.

ART! (also i have gotten so much art i can not possible include it all but really thank you it means the world to me, but END NOTES ARE BITCHES)

[tina!techno lookin' all angsty and COOL](#) and [tina!purpled](#) by Roo

Fran drew [tina!golden boys](#) (my beloveds!)

FLORIS THE ONLY PERSON EVER [DREW THIS](#), cw: body horror & bloodd

GOOSE DREW [TINA!TOMMY](#)

[aardrick](#) drew [tina!techno](#) and [tina!SBI](#) too!

[ROZY](#)MY BELOVED DREW [WILBUR KICKING TOMMY OFF A ROOF](#) ALSO BIG SHOUT OUT TO ROZY FOR DOING SO MANY AMAZING PIECES IN GENERAL SUCH AS THIS [LOGSTEDCHIRE LANDSCAPE PIECE](#) and so many others I sadly do not have the character space to link.

ALSO THIS SUPER COOL [TINA!TOMMY DRAWING](#) AND [THESEUS DRAWING](#) AND THIS REALLY REALLY GOOD DRAWING [OF TINA WILBUR](#) ALL BY PHANTOM (cw: gun)

TAY ALSO DREW [TINA!GOLDENBOYS AT THE GALA](#)

This stunning [Theseus design](#) by Yoomi

Also shout out to the gacha community because believe it or not I do see the things you make! And some of them are really cool, in particular this one [by Katrina](#) which I saw and immediately fell in love with (please heed the warnings on the actual video though if you do decide to watch.)

ALSO MARMS DREW THIS SUPER SUPER COOL [TINA!TOMMY DRAWING WITH A FLOWER](#) LIKE AAAAAA /pos

And Humanoid made this [comic which made me do a lil' wheeze ngl](#)

JORJA WROTE THIS [TINAAOS TOMMY SONG](#) AND I LISTENED TO IT ON LOOP WHILE WRITING

Hey bitches! I'm glad to be back, thank you for all the support I've gotten while on break. It's really been super nice to hear and super helpful. I hope y'all are well and taking care of yourself! I'm not gonna lie to you and say that updates will be sooner, because they probably won't and that just makes me a liar.

In Which I GAVE YOU CRIMEBOYS GET OUT OF MY HOUSE

Chapter Summary

“Do you—” he stops to breathe a little more. “Have a barbeque.”

“What?” Phil says, “Of course I have a barbeque. Wilbur we have barbeques every Summer—”

“Okay,” Wilbur claps his hands together, “Fundy is back at work and outta hospital, so everyone wants to have a celebration but the actual boss people suck, so I was thinking. Instead of having a boring party here we go to yours.”

Phil looks at him. “And who is the ‘we’ in this?”

give me some slack. it's a 30k word chapter i stayed up at like 1am to put together so i could get it out sooner

or. this is /gen all fluff and filler and brothers

Chapter Notes

Warnings:

- lots of food mentions,
- bomb mentions (they talk about the gala),
- alcohol (some of the characters get a little bit drunk but they're all sweethearts it freaks tommy out a little but i can assure you 100% everything is fine)
- blood mentions and descriptions& medical mentions

- **PANIC ATTACK**

Starts from the line:

“Toms—” Wilbur hesitates for a second. “Are you safe?”

Ends at:

Tommy takes a deep breath, trying to steady himself. His hands are shaking and tears are still rolling, but he isn’t sobbing anymore. He’s managed to calm himself down a little, or Techno did, which is probably more accurate, and his breathing has evened out. Even just a little bit, but it’s steadier, he’s sure of it.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“I really think I can chug this entire drink,” Tommy says, he picks up the water bottle and turns it around in his hands. “I really think I can.”

Phil seems more tired than usual, which is rather impressive. “You can not chug a two litre drink bottle— that’s not me commenting on you, that’s me commenting on how far you can push a human body.”

Tommy holds the drink bottle to his face. “I mean technically it’s only half full. That means it’s only a litre I’d have to drink. And I think I can do that.”

Phil sighs, “Tommy. Please do not—”

Tommy starts trying to chug all the water as quickly as possible. He manages almost all of it before he realises he's forgotten to breathe so he spits the water on the ground and gasps for breath.

"Why?" Phil asks.

"Because," Tommy returns, "Anyway so moving on."

"You spat all the water across the floor."

Tommy pauses for a moment, "Maybe."

Phil just sighs, "Where the fuck is Wilbur?"

Like clockwork, Wilbur bursts into the room, he slams the door open before looking at Phil with wide eyes. "Phil!"

"Wil!" He yells back in the same tone.

"Do you—" he stops to breathe a little more. "Have a barbeque."

"What?" Phil says, "Of course I have a barbeque. Wilbur we have barbeques every Summer ___"

"Okay," Wilbur claps his hands together, "Fundy is back at work and outta hospital, so everyone wants to have a celebration but the actual boss people suck, so I was thinking. Instead of having a boring party here we go to yours."

Phil looks at him. "And who is the 'we' in this?"

Wilbur takes a deep breath. “Well, us of course— Dream, Quackity, Sapnap, Niki, Tommy might wanna invite his friends—” he pauses before looking at Tommy. “Wait, do you even have friends?”

“Of course I have friends.”

“Your age,” Phil adds and that makes Tommy have to stifle a laugh. “Anyway Wil, who else?”

“Well probably Sapnap and George and Puffy and— I was gonna say Sneeg but that might not go down now that I think about it. Uh— we really don’t have many friends do we?”

“Not really,” Phil says, “That’s alright though we can accommodate for any spares. When is this?”

“Tonight?” Wilbur says slowly.

Tommy watches in real time as Phil’s soul separates from his body and he separates into another dimension. He then comes back and stares at Wilbur with wide eyes, “Wil—”

“I was excited!” Wilbur defends, “Look I know this isn’t ideal, but like we’ve done things more difficult in less time. Like... Dream’s birthday last year, that was a whole tower event and we organised that in like an hour. We can do this.”

Phil looks at Tommy, he seems a bit more tired and that makes Tommy laugh. “Hey Toms, have you ever wondered what being an intern is like?”

“Significantly more shitty?” Tommy says, “Worse pay— worse jobs, generally a terrible time. Solid would not recommend?”

“Correct!” Phil says, “I can not believe we’re sending our valued employee to run errands.”

“I think you can. Tommy is very easy to send on errands. *Intern, get me a coffee.* ” He says in what is probably supposed to be an exaggerated posh accent but it doesn’t sound that much different from his usual accent.

Tommy responds by picking up a half full coffee mug from the bench and pelting it at Wilbur’s head.

Wilbur manages to *just* duck out of the way, and Phil sighs as it breaks against the floor.

“There’s your fuckin’ coffee,” Tommy says with a mock bow, “Your royal highness, is there anything I can get you. Can I shine your shoes, do you need your clothes washed and do ya meals need cookin’?” He lets his accent come through a bit stronger than it normally does.

He stands up straight and gives Wilbur a deadpanned look.

Wilbur crosses his arms.

Tommy reaches for another mug, he’s planning on making sure this one hits.

“Okay! Okay!” Wilbur yells, “I’m sorry, I’m sorry you’re not an intern! You’re our favourite social media manager— also the only one who solely has this job. I am sorry for slandering you.”

“And Floof loves me more than you.” Tommy says.

“What?”

“That must be included in the peace treaty.”

Wilbur groans, he drags his feet around like a child before looking at Tommy. “Tommy, I am sorry for calling you an intern, and Floof loves you more than me. I can’t even be mad about it because it’s true.”

Tommy grins, “That is correct. Thank you, Wilbur.”

Wilbur rolls his eyes, “You are my least favourite child, just— ever, you’ve done everything wrong. If I could punt you off a roof I would.”

Now. It would be hilarious if he just said—

Tommy opens his mouth.

Techno opens the door and walks in, there’s a bit of a limp and he looks around. He apparently seems to sense that Tommy was about to out himself as Theseus and gives Tommy a deadpanned look. “Tommy.”

“Techno.”

“What the fuck are ya doing?” Techno says.

“Honestly? Not a lot, Wilbur said he wants to punt me off a roof and I should really tweet about that wait.”

“Wait no—” Wilbur says.

It’s too late because Tommy already has his phone and he’s typing as fast as he can

[@arandomintern](#): i just got threatened to be punted off a roof, guess who by?

Wilbur's, Techno's and Phil's phones all buzz and Tommy just looks around at the three of them. "No way you all have my notifications on."

"Uh..." Phil says.

Techno shrugs, "Someone needs to make sure you won't embarrass us to another degree. Might as well be us."

Wilbur nods, "Yup. That's why. Also stop replying to so much fanart."

"No, fuck you," Tommy says.

Now what Tommy's going to do, is a little bit of fuckery. He leans up against the wall and holds his phone a bit closer than he normally would. He manages to switch the account easily and looks back down at his phone.

Techno seems to catch his drift because he clears his throat. "Okay so Henry snitched that you were doing a celebration thing tonight. At Phil's I think? Just know if we invite Dream he will find a collection of people."

Tommy starts typing.

"Well it's not like it's a high school house party," Wilbur says, "I think— I never went to one of those." Wilbur looks at Tommy. "Did you ever go to a party?"

"Yeah?" Tommy says, "Remember I was three years younger than everyone there. It was a boring time, uh— I feel like Techno went to more parties than me."

“I did not.” Techno deadpans, “Tommy I’d rather eat my own prosthetic than go to an actual party.”

Tommy huffs.

[@theseusiguess](#): Gee that must be shitty for you. Where have I heard that before

[@arandomintern](#): okay just because ur a little bitch who got kicked off a roof

[@theseusiguess](#): L + ratio + i hope you get kicked off a roof

Tommy isn’t overly shocked that Wilbur’s phone starts buzzing like nothing else, but he is shocked about the way Techno doesn’t even need to open his phone and he seems to know the chaos he has just unleashed.

Techno gives him a long, (quite disappointed look.)

Tommy responds with a toothy grin.

Wilbur squints at his phone, “Is Theseus using our Wi-Fi again?”

“Probably,” Techno deadpans, “Because the clear answer rather than... I dunno anything else is to climb up the tower and—” Techno looks out the window abruptly.

Wilbur’s eyes follow Techno’s and they both look out the window.

“I could’ve sworn I just saw a flash of red...” Techno trails off.

Tommy can see the internal debate Wilbur is having, before apparently he decides that it’s not worth it and shakes his head, it seems like a movement which is largely for the benefit of himself than anyone else.

Techno looks back at Tommy. *‘You’re welcome.’* He mouths. And Tommy for once in his life is actually grateful he’s just not going to say that because that would be admitting that he needed someone to help him.

With a sigh, Techno sits down on one of the stools at the kitchen bench. He picks up a coffee mug which is clearly not his and starts drinking out of it.

“Stop drinking my coffee!” Wilbur yells, “You don’t even like straight coffee.”

Techno responds by drinking it all in one go and setting it on the counter. “No. No I do not,” Techno says easily, “In fact it is probably my least favourite drink ever. But I needed it so.”

“Okay, Techno your coffee consumption has been rather worrying,” Phil says, “You too Wilbur. Tommy—”

“I don’t drink coffee,” Tommy deadpans.

“You don’t?” Phil asks, he looks actually shocked by that. He gives Techno and Wilbur a look. “Not everyone drinks coffee in this family do they now?”

Tommy grins at the family mention before he can school his expression and that makes the side of Techno’s mouth quirk up a little bit.

“I literally need coffee,” Wilbur says.

“You don’t,” Tommy says, “That’s called an *addiction* Wilbur Soot.”

Wilbur gives him a look.

Tommy grins widely back at him.

“So the party?” Techno says, apparently fully done with this conversation. “What time, what needs to be done?”

“Well we need to message everyone we wanna invite,” Phil says, “Someone will have to go to the shops, I’ll probably need someone to help me clean up the house— Wilbur that is you because I said so.”

“But Dad—”

Phil looks around at the three of them. “Techno you message the people, Tommy I’m sending you to the shops later... maybe with Fundy if he wants to go. Wilbur, we’re gonna go home around lunch.”

“ *Lunch?* ” Wilbur shrieks, “How messy is your house?”

“We’ll start it after work,” Phil continues smoothly, apparently not answering the question. “And whatever happens, happens, if people can’t make it that’s okay. Techno make sure to mention they can bring anyone they want along we’re gonna make a lot of food.”

“Do you have gas?” Tommy asks.

“Pardon me?” Wilbur says.

“Uh— like a gas bottle, for the barbeque,” Tommy continues, “Ideally a full one.”

Wilbur looks at Phil and he shrugs.

“We’ll get one then,” Wilbur says.

And like that, they make their dumb little plan for a dumb little party that was organised last minute.

The first thing Tommy does is invite Purpled when they pass each other. Purpled is holding a stack of papers and trailing after Quackity, but he still stops when Tommy grabs his arm.

“The fuck do ya want?” Purpled says.

“Fundy’s outta hospital,” Tommy starts.

“Yeah I know,” Purpled tilts his head down at the paperwork in his arms. “That’s why I’m movin’ so much fuckin’ paperwork,” he glances up at Quackity and there’s the fond sort of anger that Tommy normally directs at Wilbur.

“Well they’re havin’ a party thing for it, a get together— I’m not sure it’s super last minute. Can you come to it?”

Purpled groans, “Tommy—”

“Please?” Tommy says, “There will be no one else there my age and I’ve been roped into planning so I kinda have to go. I’ll go on patrol instead of you tomorrow night.”

Purpled's frown lessens a little. "Okay," he says, "Deal."

"Also you can invite whoever you want," Tommy says, "Quackity, Foolish— I dunno who you talk to here but you can invite them if you want."

Purpled nods, "See you then I presume? I'm assuming that you're goin' straight there."

"Yup."

"Cool I'll get a ride with someone," and Purpled like the utter king he is, walks off to catch up with Quackity.

Tommy watches as a paper flies off the pile.

He could tell Purpled, call out after him.

Or he could... put his hands in his pockets and walk away, which is what he does. He laughs to himself as he walks, it's not that funny but to Tommy it feels like the funniest thing in the fucking world.

True enough to their word Phil and Wilbur leave at lunch, leaving the SBI floor surprisingly peaceful.

Techno sits on the couch in the main area the entire time just because he can.

It's actually nice, Tommy doesn't get a lot of work done but he has a pretty good time. Techno sulks and watches some trashy movie that Tommy finds himself getting weirdly invested in.

At about four-thirty Fundy burst through the doors. This makes Techno spin all the way around and his face lights up as soon as he sees Fundy.

He jumps off the couch and walks over about as calmly as he normally would, but he grabs Fundy before throwing his arms around him in a hug. Fundy hugs him back, and because Tommy is a little bit of a sap he takes a photo.

This one isn't going online or anywhere, he just sends the photo to Wil.

Techno let's go of Fundy and glares at him, "If you ever do that to me again, I will personally hunt you down and Elysium will be the least of your problems."

Fundy grins and nods, "Okay Techno."

"I'm serious," Techno says and all of them know he's lying. "I am going to put you in bubble wrap."

Fundy just laughs again before hugging Techno again.

It's very sweet, fucking family dynamics and bullshit.

Fundy lets go of Techno this time and he goes to look at Tommy with curious eyes, "Hi, Tommy."

"Hello Fundy," Tommy nods before walking over a bit. "Glad to see you're holding up well."

Fundy gives a short smile back, it's not fake as such but there's something strained here that there wasn't when he was speaking with Techno. Tommy's not sure if he wants to look into that anymore or if it's something he'll just let rest.

Techno gives Tommy a look and Tommy just shrugs one of his shoulders, he really doesn't know what to feel about this.

Fundy gives a brighter smile, a little less strained. "It's good to see you, I'm glad you're alright after— well the gala. That was a bit of a fuck up y'know?"

Tommy nods, "Yeah things did *not* go well at all. Not even for like a moment."

Fundy manages a small laugh at that, "You got checked up I'm presuming?"

"Huh?"

"After... the gala?" Fundy says slowly, "Like— you went to a doctor, right?"

"No?" Tommy looks at Techno and it looks like Techno is going through similar emotions as to if he kept the stove on. "I just kinda... went home afterwards."

Fundy's mouth falls open. "Tommy you were closer to the bomb than I was."

"Yeah?"

"Tommy, I have permanent hearing damage," Fundy deadpans, he motions up to his ear which has a behind-the-ear hearing aid resting on it. "I mean it could be that my hybrid type has more sensitive ears than avians but— it's still pretty odd."

"I'm fine," Tommy waves a hand, "I've been hearing fine."

Techno pulls a face.

Fundy sighs before shrugging, “I dunno man, I just don’t want you to be hurt, that’s all. You should probably get your hearing checked just in case.”

“Will do.”

Tommy will not do that, he will die before he willingly goes to any sort of medical professional.

“Anyway,” Fundy says smoothly, “We should probably head off to the party—”

Techno’s phone rings, and he sighs, holding it against his ear.

“We need bread!” Wilbur screams into the phone so loudly that Tommy can hear it from his spot on the couch. *“Techno get us bread! Right now I will start screaming! This is a threat.”*

“What the fuck—” Techno says. “We’re about to leave,” he holds the phone away from his face. “Fundy, put on your shoes right now, Tommy, do you have your bag?”

“Yes I have my bag.”

“Wilbur none of us can drive, we’re taking the train. What bakery is on the way to Phil’s house?”

Tommy picks up his bag before going through it, he has his chargers and his laptop— he’s not really sure why he’d need his laptop but he has it. He has a jumper and a half squished sandwich he was supposed to have for lunch today.

Otto! His favourite child octopus! He’s on the happy side today, and Tommy looks down at him.

“Grian’s Grain?” Techno repeats, “What sorta bakery name is that— who names their child Grian?”

“Who names their child Techno?” Fundy shoots back.

Techno sighs, he sounds a bit like Phil when he does it. The general tiredness really sells it.

“Yes we’ll grab bread. You want like... wholemeal, some rolls, generic things?”

There’s a sigh.

“Okay!” Techno says, “Tommy do you have everything? Fundy, put your shoes on right now.”

With great difficulty and Techno looking like he wishes for the ground to swallow him whole, they manage to get out of the tower and down to the subway.

In truth Tommy has never seen anyone look quite as awkward as Fundy does while standing around the subway. He looks like he does not belong there at all, which is hilarious. Techno looks one step from people throwing money at him, and Tommy can not believe that he’s the only one that looks normal.

Fundy and Techno also decide to talk the entire time, and Tommy feels sorry for the few people on the train. There aren’t many but there are *enough* that Tommy almost feels bad for the people who have to overhear their dumb conversations.

Generally it’s rather peaceful if he’s being completely honest, apart from Techno and Fundy getting into a heated debate about the best types of bread.

“White bread is just the best,” Fundy says as the train pauses.

Tommy looks up to check if this is their stop, it’s not so he glances back down at his phone.

“Tell me you eat like a toddler without tellin’ me you eat like a toddler.”

“I do not eat like a toddler it’s just the best bread.”

Tommy prays they get to their stop quicker.

They actually manage it, due to what feels like several small miracles the subway stops at their stop and Tommy basically runs off the train as Techno and Fundy bicker behind him.

Then Tommy realises he has no clue where he’s going.

He follows behind the two bickering idiots as Fundy leads the way. Upper L’Manberg is way nicer than Tommy has ever really noticed. The paths are clean, for some reason everyone is talking on a phone about some important business thing, and all the cars are way too expensive for no reason.

Tommy feels a bit ratty in his black t-shirt and blue jeans. His sneakers are still the Philza ones he got, because he loves these shoes and his other ones are falling apart and he hasn’t got time to get other ones.

He’s not getting any weird looks that he can see. And Techno is dressed even more like he got dragged off the streets of Logstedchire in his track pants and a hoodie that he is wearing despite the temperature because apparently Techno is a weirdo who hates fun.

Fundy... looks fine. He looks pretty normal.

Eventually they're led to a store, it's on the corner of the street and it's... honestly stunning.

The entire thing is painted in a deep blue colour, with golden looking highlights that frame the sign and parts of the wall. The detailing on the wall looks almost Victorian, with the dents and the bits that stick out— Tommy feels like they have some sort of architectural name but for the life of him he can not figure it out.

There are two big display windows that show what looks like an incredibly cozy room decorated with plants and some wooden furniture, and the warm light that seems to emit from the room.

Grian's Grain is what the large cursive sign reads, with golden detailing bordering the entire sign itself.

There's so much bread that Tommy wonders how much of it can get thrown out.

They walk in, there's classical music playing, and Tommy opens his mouth to call this entire establishment a wanker's bakery.

"Scar, what are you doing!" Someone yells, they sound painfully British— even more than Wilbur.

"I was just... y'know helping you restock the bread," someone returns, they're American and that kinda says all Tommy needs to know.

"You were *eating* the bread." The British man sounds a bit tired if Tommy's being completely honest. He sighs. "Stop eating all the bread, we need that! What's the point in having a bakery if you eat all the bread?"

Techno and Tommy glance at each other.

“Sorry to interrupt,” Tommy says in a voice that does not sound sorry to interrupt at all. “Wait why am I interrupting?”

“I dunno,” Techno says, before walking over to one of the shelves that is covered with various loaves, “Bein’ an asshole. You can go back to whatever you were doing.”

“Thank you,” the British one says rather politely. “Scar put that down.”

Tommy looks over.

This ‘Scar’ fella is holding a handful of bread, and he’s looking at the British man— who is yet to be identified with a name. Scar slowly lifts one of the baguette’s towards his mouth.

“Don’t you dare.”

Then Scar takes a bite out of the end of it.

“Scar!” The British man screeches.

Tommy is rather enthused by this interaction, he leans against the wall and watches as the two men bicker— not too unlike how Techno and Wilbur bicker, about nothing in particular. Tommy leans that the British man is named Grian (hence the name of the shop) and he seems tired about everything, but for some reason he also gets the feeling that Grian will also steal everything you ever own and not feel bad about it.

Grian is vaguely blond and wears a red sweater, (again despite the heat— why is everyone wearing sweaters? What is wrong with them.) And Tommy pretends not to notice the feather that’s fallen to the ground when no one’s looking.

Scar has brown hair, and Tommy thinks his name is a nickname because of what seems like two burn scars across his nose and on his cheek.

“Question,” Scar says, munching on the baguette a few moments later, when Grian has decided that he can live for taking more of the bread. “Who took the door off its hinges this morning?”

Grian goes quiet for a moment. “Dunno,” he says, “Next door’s shop also had their door taken, it’s super weird. But none of the heroes are doing anything about it— honestly what’s the point of heroes if they can’t find our doors.”

Tommy just sighs.

Eventually (after what is probably a good five minutes and several debates between Fundy and Techno), they manage to find the bread they want, and slam that onto the counter.

Kindly Grian and Scar stop their bickering for a moment.

Techno pays for the bread. (Two loaves of white bread, one of wholemeal and about twenty rolls.)

And they are finally on their way.

“So—” Tommy hears Scar say as they leave. “Are you *sure* you don’t know where our doors are going?”

“One hundred percent,” Tommy manages to hear Grian reply, before the door closes and they start off on the way to... well Phil’s house.

Fundy and Techno argue the entire way there, and Tommy kinda wants to slam a door shut on his ears if he’s being completely honest. He drags his feet along and focuses on his phone as much as he can.

Then he realises that he has Twitter and can cause problems on purpose.

[@arandomintern](#): send help. techno and fundy have been arguing about bread for like an hour

He entertains himself on his phone as they walk, responding to some people and then watches them freak out on their account which is hilarious and Tommy laughs about it because somehow he's an influencer— can he take brand deals?

If he can take brand deals then suddenly just about everything has been fixed.

“Are we there yet?” Tommy asks.

“No.” Techno deadpans.

“What about now?”

“Yes actually,” Techno deadpans, “In fact right in the middle of that road is where the house is.”

“Oh really?” Tommy glances out across the road, the very busy road. He takes a step out and Techno grabs him by the back of the collar and drags him backwards. Tommy yelps as Techno grabs him. “But you said Phil's house was there.”

“I am going to end you.” Techno says, “This is why we don't have nice things.”

“Isn't that a Taylor Swift song?” Tommy says thoughtfully, “Are you a Swiftie?”

Techno just looks at him.

“You didn’t deny it.”

“She writes good songs,” Techno says, “Are *you* a Swiftie?”

“Yes.” Tommy says, “Ranboo lives in the same house as me, of course I am.”

Techno seems to approve. He nods his head and Tommy nods back.

They keep walking.

Eventually they manage to roll up to Phil’s house. Fundy complains about the ten minute walk, then Techno mentions the fact he doesn’t have a leg and he isn’t complaining and that manages to get Fundy to shut the fuck up. Something that is honestly hilarious to watch his face drop.

Phil’s house is stunning, and it’s not dark so Tommy’s able to see it in it’s full glory for the first time. It’s a modern house, probably built in the last twenty years or so. It’s mostly white with some black framing on the windows and one of the garage doors. (Why does he have two garages?) The two garages are like two large boxes on either side of the house, with a garden patch down the middle between the two straight driveways that lead up from the road.

Tommy recognises Wilbur’s car in one of the driveways, and he recognises what looks like the wheels and bottom section of Phil’s beat up old ute that he refuses to give up for anything. So Wilbur and Phil are for sure here.

The windows themselves are big, and the windows must be tinted at least a little because Tommy can’t see through them. It’s all very boxy and modern and fancy looking, with a beautiful garden that lines the furthest sides of both driveways and leans against the fence a little.

Tommy didn't know Phil likes gardening— or paying someone else to do it. Tommy finds both funny, but there's something a little endearing about imagining Phil pruning back the bushes and weeding the garden.

Techno smiles a bit brighter seeing it, before straightening up and adjusting his jumper. He walks up one of the driveways, and Tommy follows after him.

The porch itself is actually kinda homey, there's shoes at the door. More shoes than people who live here for sure— and there's a little wicker chair that outlooks the road. It's mostly hidden behind the large bush on the garden patch, but there's a book left on the chair.

Tommy glances at it, *'The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy'* it has a bookmark in it about two thirds in. Tommy picks the book up and tucks it under his arm.

Techno knocks on the door for what seems like not the first time, he wasn't paying attention to the others however.

“Wilbur!” Techno yells, knocking on the door. “Let me in!”

Tommy sees Wilbur through the glass door.

He stands in the middle of the lounge room, very clearly looking at Techno, Fundy and Tommy standing at the door. With his precious bread he had a tantrum over.

Wilbur raises a hand to wave.

Tommy could break the lock with his powers.

That would honestly be hilarious, but Wilbur's looking at him and Fundy's standing next to him and that's not something he honestly wants to deal with at the moment. So instead he waves back.

Wilbur grins.

Then Tommy picks up the wicker chair on the porch, and holds it like he's going to throw it through the window.

This gets Wilbur to make a noise that they can hear even through the closed door and run over. He opens the door and sighs at all of them. "Tommy."

He puts the chair down.

"Anyway, welcome to Phil's," Wilbur says. "Kitchen is to the left, Fundy you're on salad duty. Techno you're supervising Fundy because he burnt the salad last time—"

"How does someone burn a salad?"

"And Tommy you are going to sit down in the lounge room, it's an open floor plan so you'll be able to see the kitchen. And Techno you are also babysitting Tommy funny enough."

Techno just looks at him. "Why am I on babysitting duty?"

And then Wilbur runs off, and Techno looks like he is seriously considering a murder.

He glances over to the kitchen and at the block of knives, before looking back at Wilbur who's halfway in the backyard. "Can't get arrested," Techno mutters to himself, before following Fundy into the kitchen.

He places the book that was on the wicker chair on one of the side tables before going to sit down, he doesn't for a moment and instead looks around.

The couch is the one that Tommy slept on after the gala, but now he can pay attention to the dark grey colour and all the pillows and blankets thrown all over it. There isn't a coffee table, but there's a fireplace and above the fireplace is a large TV.

To the right, against the wall is a couple of armchairs and a box that has even more blankets in it. Sure enough there's still the photos up against the right wall. Lots of them honestly—ones of Phil and Wilbur in very nice expensive looking European places. Ones of Fundy and Wilbur, ones of Techno attacking Wilbur with a pillow.

Tommy squints at one of the photos— that's him. It's him, Wilbur and Techno. He doesn't know when this photo was taken, but it's Wilbur and Techno arguing about something and Tommy looking like he'd rather be anywhere else. It's endearing in the way that they are.

He pauses for a moment, before smiling softly.

Oh.

And Tommy wants to cry from that, because he's never really been— worth having a photo on the wall. Never really worthy of having a report card on the fridge or his drawing hanging on the fridge.

Here he is, in a little photo on Phil's wall.

“Huh,” Tommy says. He turns around to Techno and Fundy.

Techno currently looks pained as he explains how to use a knife to cut a head of lettuce.

“My photos on the wall,” Tommy gestures over his shoulder.

That makes Techno give a smile, a knowing one, and Tommy is grateful that Techno... gets it.

“Haven’t ever really been in a photo,” Tommy says.

Techno nods, and he gets it. “Well— we’re probably gonna have to put some more up soon. Phil doesn’t need the photos of us as awkward teenagers.”

Tommy turns back around to the photos on the wall trying to find photos of Techno and Wilbur as awkward teenagers.

He gives up eventually and realises he can just ask Phil later, and he flops onto the couch. Taking up as much space as physically possible because he deserves it.

And he just kinda... chills there. Because he doesn’t really have much else to do, he gets on his phone like the mad lad he is and then does nothing. He scrolls on social media and he tunes out Techno explaining that they don’t need to actually put the salad in an oven and this is why it got burnt last year.

It’s quiet, the way Tommy likes it.

“Is that not annoying you?” Techno says.

Tommy looks up from his phone. “What?”

“The clock?” Techno looks up at a clock. It’s hanging behind him and Tommy turns around to see it. “It’s like the loudest clock ever.”

Tommy squints.

Okay. He's supposed to be hearing this clock, especially if Techno has specifically drawn attention to it. That means that he's supposed to be hearing it, and acting appropriately.

"Eh," Tommy shrugs a shoulder, "It's fine, I'm just tuning it out."

Techno raises an eyebrow before turning back around.

The silence, and the calmness is rather nice. Fundy is... doing Fundy things, Techno is babysitting and Tommy is just on his phone, not doing anything in particular.

Kristin and Niki show up, and Niki brings Floof, the only dog ever.

Niki looks so cool if Tommy is being completely honest. Her hair is no longer pink, but it's a blonde colour which has some pink bits still remaining from what seems like a last minute dye job. It looks amazing though.

She also has a nose piercing now, which was not there last time Tommy saw her. It's a stud on the left side of her nose. She also has a great big smile and what looks like fresh bread.

Kristin stands beside her, and she looks lovely in a flowy black dress which looks like one of those dresses that would be really fun to spin around in. Tommy thinks it's a bit too hot to be wearing black, but Kristin must be built differently as she's the only woman ever.

"Tommy!" Niki says as he opens the door.

"Niki!" Tommy responds, "Kristin, hi!"

"Hi, Tommy," she says with a smile.

Tommy steps aside and basically invites her in, which is an offer Kristin takes and she walks past him with Floof who seems rather happy about the fact he's being carried everywhere and doesn't have to walk.

"You look so cool!" Tommy grins, "I love the hair!"

"Oh, thank you!" She says brightly and reaches up to touch her hair. "I decided I was pink for too long and it was time to change it up."

"It looks amazing," Tommy says with a nod, "And the nose piercing?"

Niki laughs and her hand absent-mindedly touches the piercing. "Yeah, only one for now but I'm planning on getting more."

"I should get a piercing," Tommy mutters. "Wilbur has his ears pierced. I feel left out."

Niki just smiles and ruffles his hair. "Maybe if your parents let you."

"My parents are dead."

Niki looks almost regretful for a moment, before she gives an awkward but endearing smile. "Yeah! My point exactly."

Tommy manages to keep a straight face for three seconds before he wheezes. "Niki, you can't just say that to an orphan."

"You can get a piercing as soon as your parents say so," Niki responds and moves past Tommy in a way that is rather smooth if he's being completely honest.

In the time they've had that conversation Floof and Kristin have gone outside and Niki follows after them.

Sam, Puffy and Foolish do the same thing, Tommy says hello and points them outside.

It's nice, and calm.

Tommy's the professional door hugger... it's a great time.

Then Wilbur walks in.

He walks over to Tommy before flopping next to him. "Tommy."

"Yeah?"

"Where's Otto?" Wilbur asks.

Tommy goes quiet and they both look at each other. There's a moment of understanding that passes between the two of them, a moment of understanding and knowing.

Then Wilbur dives for his bag and Tommy does too.

Tommy manages to grab the bag first, because he rolls out of the way before basically ripping it open. His poor zip seems to squeak about the entire thing, and Tommy grabs Otto out of his bag.

Wilbur stares at him for a moment, before lunging to try and grab him.

Tommy moves Otto (the only boy ever) out of the way and sprints towards the door. He pushes it open and emerges into the backyard.

It's a lovely backyard, it has a sheltered area with a large table set up. Several plates and the barbeque, which has no right to be as big as it is. They're making so much food— wait Tommy can't have this food—

Eh fuck it, Purpled's not gonna say anything. Techno might but he'll just avoid him.

The backyard is mostly green grass, with a washing line to the right on the other side of the sheltered bit. There's a tree in a far corner, which is tucked away into a corner on the side of the house. There are also flower beds and vegetable gardens tucked away against the back fence.

It's a pretty big backyard—

“Get here!” Wilbur yells, and Tommy breaks into a run.

He runs through the sheltered bit, ducking and weaving past Sam and Phil. He hits the barbeque which still isn't warm on his way through.

“Please don't knock the barbeque,” Phil mutters.

Sam seems about equally as tired as Phil.

Wilbur and Tommy sprint around the backyard as fast as physically possible.

Tommy runs around the washing line a few times, before jumping up and grabbing onto the metal bars. It's short enough that he pushes himself off the ground and spins around for a bit as Wilbur— like a dumbass— chases after him.

He lets go, before doing a roll, for no reason apart from that he can— and he runs towards the vegetable garden, they're all in box looking things. Wooden boxes, and Tommy thinks he can scamper up the tree using them.

Jumping up onto the first box, he manages to gain some height and momentum as he jumps onto the second box which creaks a little bit underneath his weight. He runs onto the next one, before jumping in the air.

He jumps, placing one foot on the fence to give him some extra height. Then his hands manage to grab one of the branches and he starts trying to scamper up onto the tree.

A hand grabs his foot, and Tommy starts kicking.

“As impressive as that was, Tommy,” Wilbur says, “We can not be havin’ this.”

And then he gets dragged off the tree and hits the ground with a thump. It hurts a bit more than Tommy would necessarily appreciate.

Before Wilbur can do anything else, he rolls away before darting behind the tree he just attempted to scale.

Wilbur stands around the other side. They both feign going around the side for a moment and the other will match their movements, going the opposite direction.

Tommy grips Otto with more force than he probably needs.

“Fuck no,” Tommy says, “You are not kidnapping my only son, my beloved child Otto.”

“Too bad!” Wilbur replies, “I am getting Otto if it kills me.”

Tommy picks up a stick... and by that it's about half a branch. It's not a super thick branch but he knows he shouldn't be carrying it as easy as he is. He's supposed to be a scrawny teenager but he's a scrawny teenager who is a bit stronger than he should be.

Anyway— he can let people theorise about that later.

He swings the branch thing at Wilbur.

Wilbur yelps. "Don't hit me with a branch!"

"Too late," Tommy replies grinning and walking forwards. "I'm gonna hit you with a branch."

He manages to get Wilbur in the side of leg who yells like Tommy has broken all his bones. For a hero he's really bad at getting hit—

Wilbur apparently seems to take offence because he phases through the next swing and goes back to a solid being before tackling Tommy.

Tommy does *not* squeal as he hits the ground (he doesn't! You have no proof.) But he lets out a... manly yell and he hits the ground with a thump. Wilbur also hits the ground, more landing on his shoulder than Tommy.

He throws the branch aside before holding Otto as far away from Wilbur as possible. He's still on the ground, but also managing to hold Otto in the air and away from Wilbur.

Wilbur tries to swipe for Otto and Tommy moves the stuffed animal out of the way just in time as he tries to pick it up and steal it. Tommy is not going down without a fight, and sure he might be on the floor as Wilbur reaches to try and steal him, but he's not letting that happen.

Tommy looks around, no one is watching them.

Techno is— but he looks a bit tired.

Phil and Sam are trying to figure out how a barbeque works while Kristin and Niki laugh in the background and sip on their drinks. Puffy is talking to Foolish across the other side of the backyard, and Foolish does not seem happy about it.

No one else is here yet— that he knows of. And even if they are here then the only window facing them is a bathroom window. The likelihood of someone looking out of that at that exact moment has to be incredibly low— like statistically.

Fuck it. What's the point in his powers if he can't abuse the shit out of it to annoy everyone around him? There would be none.

He moves his hand away and moves Otto from Wilbur with it.

Then he does a small flick with his other hand and summons his powers.

A stick rips itself off the tree, before hitting Wilbur on the head.

It's not an overly large stick, but it manages to make Wilbur look actually surprised and he looks up.

Tommy manages to kick Wilbur in the knee and scramble away from standing up off the floor.

“Techno!” Tommy screeches holding Otto and running.

Wilbur gets up a few moments and runs after him as well, the grass moves behind them.

Tommy manages to jump up and swing himself around so he's clinging onto Techno's back. He grips onto Otto like his life depends on it.

"I am not giving you a piggyback."

"No, I think you are!" Tommy yells back.

Wilbur reaches for Otto and Tommy leans back.

Techno yells and grabs onto Tommy's shins to stop him from falling. Tommy then gives a grin to Wilbur who looks annoyed and horrified to say the least.

Tommy stays leaning out, and Techno is probably more stressed than ever.

"Give me the octopus!" Wilbur yells.

Tommy will not be giving him the octopus.

Wilbur tries to reach from the right.

Tommy leans to the left.

He tries to reach from the left.

Tommy leans to the right.

“Not today *bitch*. ” Tommy spits.

“Maybe today, bitch,” Techno says.

Then he has the audacity to drop Tommy. Tommy lands on his feet because he’s a competent person who knows what he’s doing. He glares at Techno, his mouth open in pure betrayal.

“Oh you fucker—” Tommy says.

And Wilbur dives for him.

Tommy decides he needs to be a man with a plan, and that plan is that he’s going to run over to Niki and dare Wilbur to try and take Otto from him while Niki is nearby. Because Niki and him are besties he’s just decided—

He sprints over to where Niki and Kristin are now sitting. Just on the grass, both looking very lovely and like they’re having an amazing time.

So Tommy dives in between them, before scrambling so he’s sitting behind Kristin. He grabs onto her shoulders and hides.

Wilbur glares from his spot, still standing up.

“If you hurt me, you hurt Kristin,” Tommy says easily. “And Kristin— is the only woman ever, you don’t want to hurt her, do you?”

“Kristin...” Techno says, walking so he’s standing next to Wilbur. “I will give you a photo of Floof when he was a baby, and a video of him chasing his own tail— and throw in that one photo of Floof with a blanket on his head and looking grumpy if you let Tommy go.”

They’re teaming up on him!

Niki smiles, “Kristin— I’ll find us another round of drinks if you promise to protect Tommy with your life.”

Fuck yeah! Niki is his new best friend, Wilbur and Techno suck.

Tommy smiles, it’s a rather polite thing and he puts his head on Kristin’s shoulder before grinning up at Techno and Wilbur.

“Phil!” Kristin yells.

Phil looks up, “Yeah?”

“Floof pictures or drinks.”

Phil pauses, “If Niki’s offerin’ you the drinks she also has Floof pictures.”

“Oh Ender, you’re right!” Kristin exclaims, “Niki... if you get the drinks now I will defend Tommy in your absence.”

Tommy pauses— just for a moment, “Wait how do you two know each other?”

Niki manages a small smile, “Kristin organises lots of the catering for tower events and requests food from my bakery. It’s a pretty good deal, I get paid and she gets food. I’ll be back.”

Then she walks off.

Apparently it's Wilbur's go to negotiate because he crouches so he's at the same level as the pair of them.

“Techno sit down.”

“I think you overestimate just how much I can bend with this leg.”

“I’ve seen you on the floor before.”

Techno gives him a look, “Yeah and that fucked up my leg.”

Wilbur rolls his eyes before looking back at Kristin, something more serious in his eyes. Well — serious is a strong word, he does not look serious at all.

“Kristin, if you... hand the child over. I will give you...” he reaches into his pocket and pulls out a piece of fluff. “This.”

“I— I don’t want that.”

“Damn.” Techno deadpans, “Our foolproof plan fell through.”

“Kristin if you don’t hand me over I will engineer an opportunity for you and Phil to hang out — alone.”

Kristin pauses for a moment, “Boys, I’m really not seeing a benefit in handing Tommy over. I get drinks, a wingman and Floof pictures if I ask.”

Techno hums, “Yeah... but you get two wingmen.”

Kristin looks at them, “I’m sorry but with Wilbur you count as half of one.”

“Hey!” Wilbur yells.

“Y’know what, that’s fair,” Techno says. “Very well. We negotiated our best. Wilbur...”

“She was mean to me!” Wilbur yells.

Techno grabs him by the collar and drags him off.

Tommy grins.

He moves so he’s sitting next to Kristin. She’s looking at Phil and Sam still trying to figure out how the barbeque works. And Tommy also watches with curiosity, he watches as both of them figure out how to attach the gas bottle.

Oh they’re dumbasses.

Tommy snickers a little as he watches Sam and Phil really try to use their brain cells to put this together.

“Are we gonna tell them they need to connect the gas?” Tommy whispers, leaning towards Kristin.

Kristin laughs and shakes her head.

“Nah I don’t think so,” Kristin grins, “You’re doing great Phil!” She calls out.

Phil looks up, then he flips her off.

That makes Kristin clap her hands and laugh, throwing her head back.

Tommy and Kristin watch Phil try to figure out how the barbeque works, which honestly is rather funny. Because they have their phones up and everything and neither of them can figure it out. Sam, one of the best technology engineering people in the country and Phil, the person who figured out how to transport netherite.

Niki comes back with Kristin’s drink, and apparently she has some sympathy for Sam and Phil because she looks at the two of them and sighs.

“So,” Kristin says, “Why Otto?”

“Huh?” Tommy looks at her.

“Your octo-friend,” Kristin continues, “I think his name is Otto. I may have heard wrong though which wouldn’t be great. Why the name Otto?”

“Oh!” Tommy grins and looks down at his best boy. Otto is on the red side, the happy side and Tommy smiles at the little stuffed animal. “I had a classmate named Otto when I was... very small, and I liked the name a lot so it just... kinda stuck y’know. And so— okay you can’t tell anyone this, but I used to have like three other stuffed animals named Otto.”

“Aw,” Kristin coos, “Tommy—”

“You’re sworn to secrecy.”

“That’s so cute! I can imagine you as a child naming all of them Otto because you liked the name.”

That is exactly what he did.

Then he got Clementine the cow... which... yeah Tommy’s gonna ignore thinking about how that ended up.

“You can’t tell Wilbur,” Tommy says looking around, just in case he’s lurking like the menace to society he is. “He would make fun of me forever.”

“He’d find it endearing.”

“He would not.”

Kristin smiles and rolls her eyes, “Wanna know something Phil told me.”

Tommy sits up a bit straighter and grins. “Yes?”

“When Wilbur was apparently about ten or eleven, he would name all the toys he got Friend. Because he didn’t want any of them to feel left out and to not be his friends.”

Tommy laughs, throwing his head back and slapping himself on the leg. “Please that’s the funniest thing— that’s such a Wilbur move.”

“I mean, you did it too and you weren’t even raised together.” Kristin smiles, there’s something almost sly there... something a bit cheeky. “I’d say you’re like brothers.”

“With Wilbur?” Tommy actually laughs at that, “Yeah okay and I’m also an astronaut.”

Kristin shrugs but there's something knowing in her eyes.

“Anyway Wilbur is a bitch boy I could never be brothers with a bitch boy—”

There's a noise behind him, and a hand is clamped over Tommy's mouth.

And see...

Something in Tommy's head knows that this is just someone he already knows, mucking around and generally having a good time. But something else in Tommy's head screams and his fight or flight kicks off.

He elbows his 'attacker' in the knee, who makes a pained noise from that.

Then Otto, (best boy) is snatched from his hand.

“We got him!” Wilbur yells, slightly to his left.

“My knee,” Techno mutters, “Fuckin’ hell.”

He lets go of Tommy and Tommy whirls around to look at him. “Don’t fuckin’ sneak up behind me.”

Techno shrugs, “Worth it. If you got kidnapped you’d be a bit helpless.”

“I would *not*. ”

“I just think ya would, kid,” Techno says, “You freezed up.”

“I elbowed you.”

“In my prosthetic leg!”

“Why were you complaining about your knee then.”

“I hurt my other knee jumping down from out of the tree,” Techno looks up at the tree he apparently jumped from. “Yeah... that was not a good idea now everything hurts.”

Wilbur is holding Otto.

Tommy glares at him, “If you hurt Otto, best boy, you will not live to see tomorrow.”

“I’m just looking after him!” Wilbur defends, “I’ll put him back in your backpack.”

Tommy sighs.

This fight really isn’t worth it— especially if Wilbur is just gonna... put Otto back in his backpack. Instead what he does is sigh, and flops onto the ground.

Techno flops down on the ground next to him and Wilbur decides he *has* to be the quirkiest in any situation because he lands on top of Techno and Tommy.

“Get off,” Techno mutters.

Wilbur moves around like the bitch boy he is, before forcing his way between Techno and Tommy.

“Did you really have to—”

“Yes.”

“But like... why—”

“Because, Techno.”

Techno sighs, and decides this isn't worth it because he looks up at the sky.

For a moment everything is peaceful.

The grass is against Tommy's skin, it feels like it's been freshly cut because the ground smells like grass. The tree above him is rustling and swaying— not too much, but there's a nice Summer breeze now.

Roughly he can hear the mutters of Foolish and Phil, and he can hear the semi-frequent swearing of Sam whenever barbeque oil spits up at him. Overall it's very nice... it's very lovely. People are chattering, cars are going past in the distance.

Tommy can't hear any birds which is a bit upsetting but he thinks he's going to make it through this terrible time. He's next to Wilbur and Techno.

Wilbur makes a noise.

It's one of the weirdest noises that Tommy's ever heard so he sits up.

The best way he can describe it, is like a chirp but if you pitched the chirp down so it's a mix between a low grumble and a normal noise.

"Wilbur, what the fuck?"

"Stomach doin' stomach thing," Wilbur doesn't even open his eyes.

"Get that checked, what the fuck."

"It's fine," Wilbur waves a hand dismissively and still refuses to open his eyes, "It does that sometimes it's fine."

Tommy isn't quite sure, but he lays back down.

Another moment of peace and quiet.

Then he hears a car roll up.

Then another car rolls up and Tommy sighs.

And he can... hear the noise.

He realises that Dream and his friends are all kinda loud people. He can hear them all argue up to the door, then knock on the door and they all hesitate for what is probably a moment too long.

“Tommy!” Phil calls out, “Go get the door.”

“Make Wil do it!”

“Tommy.”

Tommy groans and stands up. He's not happy about this entire thing.

“Also Sapnap’s not allowed in the kitchen!” Phil calls out, “No matter what he says.”

He stands up and stomps towards the front door, where he looks at the people standing at Phil’s door.

It is: Dream, George, Sapnap, Quackity, Purpled and Karl the reporter who Tommy met that one time.

Purpled looks like he’s about to murder someone, which makes Tommy laugh.

“Hello!” Tommy says surprisingly cheerily. “Nice to see you again, Karl.”

Karl laughs, “You too Tommy, don’t worry I’m not here to do work, this one,” he nudges Sapnap. “Invited me.”

“Well, welcome to the Philza house. It’s like a vlogger house except one person lives here and none of them are vloggers.”

“So... just a house?” George says screwing up his nose. “Tommy what does that mean?”

“Gogy— that is for me to know.”

“Why are you calling me that?”

“It’s funny,” Tommy says, “Okay the TV has a console. You can’t bother Fundy... not allowed into the kitchen unless you can cook—” Sarnap moves forwards and Tommy pushes him back. “Also according to Phil you’re not allowed in the kitchen.”

“But—”

“I got told under any circumstances.”

Sarnap glares.

“I am going to direct you all to the... various video games Phil has. Daniel, you’re with me.”

“And why the fuck is that?”

“Because I missed you asshole,” Tommy says.

Purpled looks at him. “I didn’t fuckin’ miss you.”

“Oh he did,” Quackity chirps up. “He was like *‘oh it’s been so long since I’ve seen Tommy’* and then he played Fruit Ninja.”

“I just did not say that—” Purpled says.

Tommy steps to the side and the... pretty big group files in. Like school children they walk in a line and walk into the lounge room in an orderly fashion.

He closes the door and turns around.

Purpled has his arms crossed and is leaning against the wall. "I didn't miss you."

"I think if you say it more I'll believe you."

Purpled just gives him a look.

"In fact I think you should say it a few more times so it can really settle in and you prove your point."

"I literally hate you."

"I think you should say that more, it really helps solidify that."

Purpled picks up a book and chucks it at Tommy's head. Tommy manages to duck out of the way and it hits the door behind him.

He picks the book up and puts it back.

"Your aim is terrible."

"I meant to miss motherfucker."

"I don't think you did," Tommy hums, "In fact I think you're just losing your abilities."

“You’re about to lose your abilities to breathe if you’re not careful—”

Tommy rolls his eyes and walks away.

“You’re not allowed to fuckin’ walk away from me.”

“Oh no, I think I am.”

“Are you?” Purpled says.

Tommy reaches the lounge room, where George and Sapnap are using their combined brain cells to turn the console on. Which goes surprisingly well because they manage to both find the controllers and turn on the console.

Which when Tommy thinks about it, it’s probably not the first time they’ve been here and they probably know how to work this without thinking.

After a big of mucking around they all sit down, apparently ready to play Mario Kart.

Purpled sits on the floor and crosses his legs, Tommy sits down next to him and hesitates for about two seconds before leaning on his shoulder.

“You motherfucker!” Quackity yells as Dream blue shells him.

Tommy closes his eyes.

“You’re not sleeping on my shoulder.”

“You’d find I am,” Tommy mumbles, “Didn’t sleep much.”

Purpled pauses. “I know. You’re pretty obvious.”

Tommy just sighs, and watches the TV.

From what he can gather George is winning, completely blitzing it. Dream is behind him and Quackity, Sapnap and Karl are way behind and know they’re not gonna win but they’re vibing.

Karl keeps managing to shell Quackity which makes Sapnap laugh which then makes Quackity laugh and generally they’re a bit of a mess with laughing and running off the track. It’s all very wholesome in a way that makes Tommy smile lazily.

“Who’s gonna win?” Purpled whispers.

“Dream,” Tommy says, “I like Dream more.”

“I heard that,” George deadpans.

Tommy smiles brightly.

They watch intensely as they do the last lap.

Purpled grins as Dream picks up a blue shell.

George gets shelled on the last lap, a few moments from the finish line.

Dream wins.

The noise that George makes is inhuman.

And Tommy watches with interest as George turns to Dream and starts attacking him. It looks quite violent actually and Purpled watches with curiosity.

“Should we intervene?” Purpled asks Quackity.

“I think I’ll get hurt.” Quackity says.

They fight and Tommy is concerned.

After not too long, Tommy thinks George is okay with his loss and he’s not going to actually fucking murder Dream.

Tommy wanders outside after making sure George isn’t actually going to kill anyone because he lost at Mario Kart which is always fun.

The barbeque appears to be going well— Tommy doesn’t know a lot about barbeques but nothing is on fire and he think that’s good. Wilbur and Techno and Fundy are all running about the table setting places and Puffy appears to be standing on a chair and supervising.

He has so many questions.

“Puffy?” He calls out.

Puffy looks at him, “Yeah, Tommy?”

“Why are you on a chair?”

“Patrolling.”

Tommy looks around at all the food starting to be assembled on the table, back at Puffy and gives what must be the sloppiest salute in the history of all salutes. “Well thank you for your work Captain.”

“Tommy,” Phil says, “Can you grab everyone from inside please?”

“I was literally just there— make Wilbur do it.”

“Tommy...” Phil says warningly, and it’s the exact same tone he uses with Wilbur and Techno.

Tommy sighs. “I hate you.”

“Okay.”

“I mean that.”

“Okay, mate.”

Tommy glares and stomps back inside.

Dream is currently hitting Karl with a pillow, just over the head again and again. The screen is paused and Sapnap is laughing so hard he’s clutching his side. Purpled looks like he’d

rather be literally anywhere else—

Quackity is grinning and there's something fond about it.

“Hey guys—” Tommy says.

Everyone stops to look at him, Dream halts his attack and looks over at Tommy curiously.

“Dinner's ready.”

And it's like a fucking tidal wave. Everyone stands up at once, leaving the controllers in the closest available place and running.

Dream shoves Quackity out of the way and jumps over half the couch, and Tommy has to basically throw himself out of the way.

Purpled manages to be the next one out, with a sneaky elbow to the ribs and Quackity really can not get a break—

George and Sapnap nudge and try to fight each other the entire way to the door. Which is fun until Karl manages to get between them and run out the door.

Quackity looks like he's having... well several regrets. He gives Tommy a knowing look and Tommy smiles sympathetically.

“My friends are the worst,” Quackity mutters but his smile is too big to really mean that.
“Bastards the lot of them.”

Tommy knows the feeling.

“Yup,” Tommy nods, “Mine are the same.”

Quackity walks out, and Tommy follows after him.

He takes the moment to first of all get the controls off the floor, and then also turn off the TV because not everyone can afford to have the TV on all the time— and yeah Phil probably can but the TV doesn’t need to be on so he might as well turn it off.

Adjusting one of the couch cushions which was knocked out of place Tommy sighs.

Where’s Ranboo to clean up after them now?

He walks back outside, leaving the glass door open because that feels like a very Summer-y thing to do.

The first thing he’s hit with is just the sheer amount of noise there is— because he forgets just *how* loud this little group is.

The table is almost as chaotic as inside was. There's a suitable amount of seats, if you include the fact Quackity and Sapnap are squashed onto a piano stool.

Techno and Wilbur are sitting down next to each other, and Wilbur is excitedly talking to Purpled while Purpled looks like he'd rather be literally anywhere else. Tommy gives Purpled a thumbs up and he gets flipped off in return.

Phil and Kristin are sitting next to Techno and next to Purpled respectively, and they appear to be deep in conversation. Fundy is sitting next to Phil and listening to the aforementioned conversation. Niki is sitting next to Kristin and also listening in on the conversation

Dream, George, Sapnap, Karl and Foolish are sitting up at the same end as Quackity and Sapnap. With those two being the head of the table. Foolish is sitting next to Puffy, and Karl is sitting next to Foolish.

The seat left for Tommy, as it appears, is wedged between Wilbur and Dream. Which is something that Tommy is more than fine with, he thinks today has the potential to be fucking hilarious.

Tommy sits down between them and Dream gives a nod. He hasn't taken off the mask yet, and Tommy is genuinely curious if he will be eating.

There's already a collection of salads and some various meats on the table. Tommy scans for anything he can eat.

Nothing.

Ah...

Well he can have a burger he might just feel a bit gross afterwards. As long as he doesn't eat too many it'll be fine—

He reaches for the bread rolls and bread knife first. Because fucking hell if he's going to be the last one getting food.

Everyone looks at him like he's wronged several countries and done a couple war crimes. Tommy just cuts his bread roll before reaching for the salad which he chucks on the roll.

"Wha'?" Tommy reaches for the tongs to grab a burger. "What does it matter?"

Purpled shrugs. "We are not using proper manners after the bullshittery of five minutes ago." And he reaches for the pasta salad.

Tommy nods, taking a bite out of his burger.

And that manages to break the table out into some sorta chaos because everyone reaches for everything at once.

At the Dream Team side of the table a small brawl starts over the potato salad and Wilbur and Techno start fighting over the bread.

Tommy's never had a big family dinner. He's never really had a big family— the closest he got were the fancy dinners with Business Bay where they would invite anyone who was anyone and Tommy would steal from people. He doesn't know if he has grandparents or aunts or cousins or uncles— he doesn't think so.

He's never really got one of these big family events, the chaotic mess that comes with them. But— he thinks this is kinda similar.

Tommy smiles into his burger.

"Sapnap I will fling potato salad into your hair if you're not careful." George threatens.

"That'll also get it in my hair!" Quackity complains. "Well— my beanie but still."

"Well I hate your beanie anyway," George says. "It's literally the worst thing you own."

"I will literally kill you." Quackity stands up, and Sapnap drags him so he's sitting down. "I will kill you— when Sapnap isn't looking."

"Oh no," George deadpans. "I'm so scared of the man who can float and got beat up by a dog."

"I said I was sorry about that!" Techno yells, "He didn't mean to, he's just a lil' guy."

"I'm partially blind in one eye!"

"Now that's just a lie," Karl says. "You can see fine out of your eyes. You got tested and everything."

Quackity's mouth falls open and he glares at Karl. "I told you that in confidence!"

"I'm a reporter," Karl grins with a lopsided smile. "It's my job to break stories. Professional snitch."

Quackity glares. "I hate you."

"You love him," Sapnap says into his potato salad. He looks up and grins widely. "You gonna say you don't?"

Quackity glares at both of them now. "I will smother you in your sleep."

"Damn—" Sapnap says. "Now how are you gonna—"

"Nope." Techno picks up Floof. "I will release the hound. He is only a baby, he can't be hearin' your general conversations."

Floof tilts his head.

Quackity stares at him. He goes quiet and looks down at his empty plate because he's been too busy arguing.

Tommy finally finishes his burger, amused with how the conversation has gone. He snatches the pasta salad and scoops way too much onto his plate.

To be fair he can eat like two burgers before he becomes a risk to himself and everyone at this table. So he thinks this is fair.

"Fucking hell," Wilbur says, looking at Tommy's mountain of pasta salad. "Save some for everyone else?"

Tommy looks at him, completely flat expression and relishes in Wilbur looking a little panicked. "Can't eat anything else." He gestures around. "Can only eat chicken."

"Wait what—" Sam says.

"Dunno man, too much makes me feel really sick." Tommy takes a scoop of the pasta salad and shovels it into his mouth. "It's honestly kinda odd— and there's not a single thing here I can eat a lot of. Apart from the salads."

"We could totally Uber Eats you KFC," Karl says. "In fact I'll just open it right now—"

"No thank you, I'm good." Tommy says.

He thinks everyone else can hear his tone shift. He doesn't mean to do it but his tone drops into the polite one— the one he only uses when talking to adults. The one that kinda screams *'hi I was abused and now I'm making up for it!'*

Apparently a couple of people on the table recognise this tone because they wince. Tommy hesitates for a moment before looking back at his pasta salad— and great job now he ruined

the mood. He really has a knack for doing that.

Purpled is looking at Tommy, a mixture of sadness and the masculine urge to hit Tommy on the head with a big stick. Which— honestly, yeah that's fair.

Tommy just looks at him.

“I'm gonna hit you with a stick,” Purpled says, which confirms Tommy's suspicions.

Tommy smiles, “Fuckin' bet.”

Purpled stands up and wanders the backyard again, sure enough he picks up a stick and hits Tommy on the head with it. Tommy doesn't react, apart from this time reaching for the potato salad.

There are no more brawls over the food, which is always nice and Tommy enjoys munchin' on the potatoes. Kristin and Phil have a conversation about... roads? Tommy doesn't really get it, but Wilbur seems super excited— although that might just be because Phil and Kristin are talking.

“Well the traffic is terrible on the Eastern side of L'Manberg,” Kristin says and she sounds rather passionate about traffic which is odd.

“I mean more people could take the trains,” Wilbur adds.

“The train system on the Eastern side is terrible,” Techno says.

Is this what people feel like when their families fight over politics at dinner? Because this kinda feels like that except much lower stakes and much less interesting because they're debating about literal... roads.

Tommy decides to turn his attention to Dream's side of the table which seems much more fun.

"I just think—" Dream says, his mask is off and he's barely touched his food. "That the dating rule is important."

"Is it?" Sapnap glances at Quackity, "I mean— like it's super constricting and why does the hero committee get to have a say over our life? Our personal lives—"

"Because people keep dying when they date heroes," Foolish adds, not overly helpful but he adds it anyway. "And then the heroes get super depressed."

"Well that's a risk you take when agreeing to date a hero," Karl says, "I mean— both of you accept that it might not end up well for you. And yeah that's less than ideal, but you're in the public limelight— it's not that different to the president being married and everyone accepts that."

"Yeah," George says, "But more heroes die than presidents."

"There's also about thirty times as many heroes," Quackity says, "That's a fuckin' stupid argument. As long as every party accepts that— hey it might not go well but the benefit of dating them is worth it."

"Yeah—" Dream says, "But everyone says that until their loved one dies and they go all Sparklez."

"We can not use Sparklez as a verb," Puffy says, it's the first time she's intervened, allowing this conversation to go on. There's something firm in her voice as she stares down Dream a bit like a mother catching their kid sneaking out. "Okay? What happened to him was tragic."

“Didn’t he go all Terminator on the heroes?” Sapnap says, “I dunno if I’m using that reference right, I’ve never watched the movie.”

Puffy looks strained for a moment, “Yeah he attacked the heroes,” she says. Tommy can’t detect much in her voice that gives her away. “But— he was still a hero and still deserves respect.”

“Do heroes deserve respect though?” Purpled yells from the other side of the table because he’s a bitch who likes drama.

Just about every person at the table looks at him. Tommy’s mouth straight up falls open and Purpled looks about as cool, calm and collected as he always does. Which is honestly kinda hilarious.

Purpled takes a bite out of the sausage he was eating. “Jus’ sayin’,” he says, “Heroes are kinda like superpowered cops.”

Tommy spits out the mouth full of pasta salad he has. It is not pretty and poor Puffy who’s sitting across from him gets the majority of the brunt from it. She does not seem overly impressed about this.

“Daniel!” Tommy says.

Purpled shrugs, “Freedom of speech.”

Tommy glances up the table to gauge everyone else’s reactions, he doesn’t move on from Quackity’s face though. He’s fucking *beaming* at Purpled, like— a huge fucking smile like he’s never been prouder of anyone.

Everyone else seems pretty amused too.

Okay— Purpled isn't getting fired, that is amazing for their shared bank account that they now have.

The meal actually manages to chill down after that, no one starts another fight. In fact the closest thing to another fight anyone has is Sapnap and Quackity arguing about something that Tommy does not hear.

What he does manage to hear however is Quackity yelling, "He is not hot."

Everyone looks at him and Quackity gives a nervous smile.

"Damn." Quackity says, "That's wild."

Sapnap laughs into his hand so hard it looks like he's going to actually keel over. He doesn't though, and keeps snickering and giving Quackity a look.

Tommy watches for a bit, so he gets to see the delight that is Sapnap nudging Quackity in the side about every three seconds and laughing about it while he gets glared at by both Quackity and Karl.

Now— Tommy hates to assume, but he is getting a couple of vibes here.

Especially with the way Sapnap seems to be laughing the hardest that Tommy has ever seen him and the way that Karl's eyes look... just incredibly fond.

Okay— there are some vibes here, Tommy's decided. Whether those three know it or not is a whole other thing.

"I just think," Niki says, which pulls him out of his people watching. "That Theseus is objectively the coolest of the Logstedchire four."

“That’s not how you use the word objectively,” Techno adds absentmindedly, like this is a common occurrence. “You wanna say subjectively because it’s your opinion.”

Niki sighs and rolls her eyes, “Look— he has the coolest name.”

“He does not,” Wilbur says.

“Then who does?” Purpled asks.

“Uh— liked that Wither guy when he was around.”

“Wilbur that’s literally me,” Techno gives him a look.

“Sorry, can’t hear you,” Wilbur holds a hand up to his ear. “Anyway, Wither is probably the coolest vigilante name.”

Tommy looks at Purpled.

His arms are crossed and he looks rather calm— concerningly so, Tommy can see the cogs working behind his brain. He’s thinking of something and now Tommy is incredibly nervous about what he’s going to say.

“Phobos is a pretty cool vigilante name,” Purpled says.

And several people look up from their plates.

Purpled is watching Wilbur though, as if he’s waiting for a reaction and he probably is.

“Never trust a bitch with Greek mythology as their name,” Wilbur says, he says it with a slight smile. “I mean— is there anyone really good who chooses a Greek myth to be their name? As a vigilante or group or whatever else—”

Techno glances at Tommy.

Now it feels like Purpled and Wilbur are having a showdown— but Tommy doesn’t understand over what, and Wilbur doesn’t appear to understand either.

Purpled shrugs, “Dunno... you’re named after a ghost so I dunno if you can be judging.”

“Ghosts are cool though,” Foolish says, and even him speaking feels like the tension in the room has been cut. “They can haunt you and stuff. Who wouldn’t want to be a ghost?”

“Me,” Niki deadpans.

“Also me,” Fundy says, “I’ve seen Wilbur get stuck in a wall— that was not pretty.”

“Yeah but he’s not an actual ghost,” George says, sounding about as enthusiastic about the world as he always does. “A proper ghost won’t get stuck in the wall.”

Wilbur stands up, grabbing his plate. “I’ll take the plates in.”

Sure enough he grabs several other empty plates before walking inside.

Tommy— he doesn’t want to think about that too hard.

“Look now you made him upset,” Fundy says.

Purpled shrugs, “I think he’ll cope with it.”

Techno sighs, pushing away from the table and standing up. “Daniel you’re lucky you don’t know the rules here or I’d kick your ass.”

“I’d like to see you try.”

And Tommy, Techno and Purpled all knows that he means it. They all know that Purpled would probably win that fight just out of pure spite and hatred and they all know that he means it— it’s more of a threat than anything else. If needed he *will* fight Techno and he *will* win.

However, the rest of the table doesn’t know that so that gets a laugh out of Quackity.

Techno rolls his eyes and walks off on his way past he grabs a couple of the empty dishes too.

Tommy decides he needs more potato salad to make this go away, and so he gets more potato salad to make this go away. He’s very easy to please in that regard, and the potato salad is fucking good and Tommy is fucking hungry.

“I reckon I’d beat an alligator in a fight,” Fundy says thoughtfully.

And that manages to basically get the entire table to start talking all at once why they tell him there is no way he could fight an alligator in any universe.

Wilbur returns looking less grumpy, Techno returns looking more grumpy and Tommy eats the entire thing of potato salad much to Phil’s horror.

Okay— the sad boy arc is over, which is always fun for everyone.

Overall it's a good time.

They pick at the leftovers as they talk about just... some really weird topics because Tommy has now learnt that Sapnap once tried to fight a squid and lost... not anything superpowered and weird. Just a general squid.

He also learns that Dream used to do ballet— because then Niki gets excited because she also used to do ballet and then they're all talking about sports they did and Tommy can't really say much because he was spending most of his childhood uh... kinda focusing on surviving.

Eventually they pick at the leftovers in what is deemed to be an acceptable amount, before Dream stands up and raises the glass of water he has, like he's going to give a toast. Which is kinda hilarious.

“I can't be fucked to get actual drinks,” Dream starts which is always a solid start. “So I'm going to do a toast— to my favourite nineteen-year-old...” his eyes land on Tommy. “Hero. Fundy.”

Fundy looks like he'd like to melt into the ground.

Wilbur is grinning so wide it looks like his face hurts.

“Fundy,” Dream says, “You're one of the best of us, you're probably the strongest of us and ___”

“I will turn my hearing aid off—”

“And I am glad you've had a full recovery, and when the time comes we're gonna kick Elysium's ass!”

That makes a couple of people cheer around the table, in particular Sapnap who cheers and throws both his arms up.

Tommy feels the pit in his stomach grow, he looks at Techno who looks just about as uneasy about the whole thing. He looks back at Dream and tries to not look like he's about to start crying.

“So here's to Fundy, the favourite baby of the group.”

“That's it I'm turning my hearing aid off—”

“And the first hero recruit we've had since Techno.”

That gets everyone to cheer, and Dream apparently concludes his cobbled together speech which is endearing in a weird way.

Tommy leans forwards so he's looking at Techno. “You were the last recruit they had?”

“Recruit's a strong word,” Techno mutters, and the absolute contempt in his voice is something that Tommy would be okay with never hearing again, please and thank you.

Eventually everyone leaves the table, and Techno moves so he was in Dream's spot.

It's kinda nice to be wedged between Techno and Wilbur. It gives him some confidence.

Tommy sighs, before leaning against Techno's shoulder.

Techno doesn't seem to mind about this and so he lets Tommy stay there, which is rather polite of him and Tommy could benefit from doing this more because— holy fuck he's so

tired.

“Shots! Shots! Shots!” Someone— that is for sure Quackity— yells.

Tommy sits up straight away and looks across the table.

And now apparently they’re getting drunk— judging by the copious amounts of bottles of *stuff* they manage to find and put on the table. Tommy’s heart seems to seize in his chest and he grabs onto Techno’s arm.

Techno also doesn’t look *super* chill about the whole thing, but he looks more chill than Tommy. “It’s a party. We’re all adults,” Techno says quietly.

“Yeah but—” Tommy cuts himself off and goes quiet.

It’ll be fine. It’s fine he grabs onto Techno’s arm a little tighter.

Wilbur looks between Tommy and Techno, before something clicks in his pea-sized brain and he puts down some of the drinks that he has in his arms. He then sits down next to Tommy.

Tommy feels a bit boxed in, but he has Techno ‘Super-Strength’ Blade to his right and Wilbur ‘Protective as Shit’ Soot to his left. So something inside him says that he’s going to be okay.

Techno laughs, leaning forwards to look at Wilbur, who also leans forwards.

“What?” Wilbur says.

“You said you were gonna get wasted.”

“Well I changed my mind,” Wilbur shoots back, he leans back into his seat.

“Too bad some other people didn’t.”

“Is he chugging that?” Wilbur says squinting at Dream. “Holy fuck—”

Dream is indeed appearing to get completely wasted and Tommy looks at Techno who looks just tired if he’s being completely honest. In actuality it’s a little bit funny how tired he looks.

“Hey Tommy.”

“Hi, Techno,” he returns easily.

“Wanna hear about the first time Wilbur got drunk?”

“Nope!” Wilbur jumps up from his seat before slapping his hand over Techno’s mouth.
“Tommy does not deserve to hear that story.”

There’s a moment where Techno appears to have been successfully silenced.

Wilbur draws his hand away and yells, “Don’t bite me!”

“He flirted with a super villain,” Techno says grinning widely. “What was her name— Sally or something? Something salmon related... it was something incredibly funny. And Wilbur is the worst at flirting.”

“I was drunk!”

Techno grins even wider, “So he was doing fish related pick-up lines. I didn’t even know you *could* have fish related pick up lines.”

“It worked though!” Wilbur defends, “She asked me on a date.”

Techno gives him a look. “It was a pity date.”

“It was not!”

“You didn’t even go!”

“Well she was a supervillain!” Wilbur defends, “I’m not going on a date with a supervillain.”

Tommy manages a smile and they keep bickering. He hates the way his eyes dart over to the people who have decided to get drunk. He hates the way his heart falters when his eyes do eventually land on them. He hates the way there’s panic rising up within him, he just needs this to not be happening—

“Stop eating with your mouth open,” Wilbur says.

“No,” Techno keeps on eating with his mouth open. “My teeth literally do not fit in my mouth.”

“Well then file them down.”

“That hurts.”

“Yeah I know that hurts,” Wilbur mutters, “But it stops your mouth from acting like fuckin’ a battleground in there.”

“Yeah but I don’t wanna file down my teeth. Don’t they grow back anyway?”

“Depends on the hybrid type,” Tommy adds thoughtfully.

Both of them look at him.

“Well— Piglin hybrids I think they grow back because they’re like a shark in that aspect, their teeth keep growing back. But like... I think cow hybrids and stuff don’t have that— something about the fact your body thinks you *need* your teeth to be in a certain shape.”

“Just file them down.” Wilbur says again, “It’s not that bad.”

Techno glares at him. “I’m not filing my teeth down. These are my bones.”

“Well, file down your other bones too.”

“I’m not filing down my teeth.”

“It hurts less!”

“Then what do I do with the chunks of teeth Wilbur? Do I put them over my pasta? Do I use them to feed my worms? Then what?”

“I dunno you can pay people to do it,” Wilbur says, “There’s a thing in Logstedchire. They even have like these huge scissors and I guess they handle it. It’s like this big tooth drill thing, like the dentist but slightly worse.”

“Why the fuck do you even know about hybrid teeth,” Tommy deadpans looking at Wilbur.

Wilbur blinks at him for a moment, before gesturing at Techno. “I have a brother who is a piglin hybrid— a hybrid type famous for their teeth growing everywhere—”

“The doctors said that’s only natural hybrids—”

“Well the doctors are bitches,” Wilbur shoots back. “Get rid of the extra bits. Like— you don’t fuckin’ need them.”

“I do!”

“You don’t!”

“That’s like saying I don’t need my tibia.”

“You only have one tibia!”

“Yeah— I still need the one I don’t have, it’s just... I don’t even know what you do with it. But I don’t have it— and I still kinda need it.”

“Do you really though?” Wilbur kicks Techno’s prosthetic with his own. “I mean you’re handling it fine on your own. So maybe you never needed your tibia like you barely need the extra bits of your teeth.”

Techno just looks at him.

Wilbur gives a big grin back.

Tommy watches as Dream tries to throw himself into a bush, and is only half-heartedly stopped by Karl.

“I think you should really—” Wilbur says.

Techno looks him in the eye, before ripping a chunk out of his burger and chewing with his mouth open. It is not pretty and Tommy looks away.

Wilbur looks like he is about to murder a man.

Tommy personally would like to watch this, so he focuses on Wilbur standing up and Techno just grinning— somehow with his mouth open.

Wilbur then picks up a plate.

“I will smash this over your head.”

“Do it,” Techno’s mouth is full so it’s a bit more muffled. “Fuckin’ try me you republican.”

“Stop calling me a fuckin’ republican.”

“Stop bein’ a fuckin’ republican!”

“I’m not a fuckin’ republican!”

“You’re telling me to eat with my mouth closed that’s a republican move—”

“Do you even know what a republican is?”

“Yeah! I’m looking at one!”

Wilbur picks up a burger and throws it at Techno.

Somehow he catches it in his mouth. He looks at Wilbur for a moment.

They both look at each other.

“Ten,” Techno says.

Wilbur just looks at him and screws up his face. “Huh?”

“Nine.”

Wilbur seems to realise and he sprints off in the other direction. He looks around for a moment, before running towards the tree.

“Eight. Seven. Six. Five. Four.”

Wilbur manages to clamber up into the tree. It is not graceful at all, and he frankly almost falls straight out, but he manages to get a bit higher than Techno could probably reach from the ground.

“Three. Two. One.”

Techno stands up and walks over to the tree.

Wilbur in a tree is a funny sight if Tommy is being completely honest, and he stares as Wilbur looks like he’s about to fall straight out of the thing because of his oddly lanky limbs which seem to be doing him zero favours.

Techno walks up to the base of the tree and stares up at Wilbur.

“Come down.”

“No,” Wilbur hugs one of the branches. “You’re gonna hurt me.”

“I’m not gonna hurt you.”

“You said that last time and you threw me!”

“Onto a couch!”

“Still hurt!”

“You’re weak!” Sapnap calls from on the ground and Wilbur flips him off.

“Get out of the tree, Wilbur,” Techno says, “The neighbours are gonna see you.”

That makes Wilbur hesitate. “No.”

“You lose Tommy privileges if you don’t get out of the tree.”

Wilbur’s mouth falls open and he stares at Techno like he’s just... Tommy can not think of a metaphor at the moment but he looks about the most offended that Tommy has ever seen Wilbur be.

“You can’t do that!” Wilbur yells, “Tommy’s his own man... boy... child?”

“Okay,” Tommy deadpans, “I won’t talk to you for a day if you don’t get out of the tree.”

“Gaslight, gatekeep, girlboss,” Dream mumbles, mostly to himself but it’s loud enough that everyone has to suffer about it as well. “Wilbuhhhhhh get outta the tree.”

Wilbur sighs, before jumping onto the ground.

Techno and him stare at each other for a moment.

“Oh shit—”

And Techno manages to actually catch him this time, before kinda... picking him up like Wilbur is an angry toddler. Which is impressive considering Wilbur is a bit taller than Techno and also looks like the most annoying thing to pick up.

Wilbur just glares at Techno. “Put me down.” He kicks his legs that don’t quite reach the floor.

“You look like...” George says thoughtfully, he pauses for a moment. He’s on the grass and apparently living his best life. He’s sprawled out on his back and looking at Wilbur lazily. “A disgruntled cat.”

“Disgruntled,” Sapnap mutters in perhaps the worst imitation of the vaguely British accent that George has.

Wilbur just looks at Techno. “Put me down.”

“Tommy take a picture,” Techno says.

“What? No!” Wilbur starts trying to kick Techno, which he actually succeeds in a couple of times. Which is honestly kinda iconic of him. Techno doesn’t react a single bit though. “Don’t take a photo of me being carried like a toddler by my little brother.”

Tommy takes the photo.

Wilbur is kindly dropped the short distance onto the ground and he glares at Techno and then moves onto Tommy. “I hate you both.”

Tommy flips him off, before making sure to send Techno the photo. “A couple of clicks and I could send this onto the world of Twitter.”

“Nope! No, no!” Wilbur says, “I have a reputation to uphold.”

“Do you though?” George mutters.

Wilbur glares at him.

“Jus’ sayin’,” George adds, and Tommy is about certain he’s going to start sleeping. “What reputation do you have Wilbur Soot?”

“Hopefully a good one,” Tommy mutters, glaring at Wilbur. “Unless you’ve done anything to have changed that?”

“No, no, no,” Wilbur shakes his head, “Please have mercy I haven’t even done anything.”

“He was trending yesterday,” Dream says like the apparent snitch he is.

Tommy looks at Wilbur.

Wilbur looks just as confused as Tommy feels. “I was?”

“Yeah,” Dream nods, “Someone got a photo of you trying to shove an entire hashbrown into your mouth.”

Wilbur goes quiet.

Tommy stares at him.

“It was a good hashbrown?” Wilbur says, which is no help at all, but he looks at Tommy with a small smile on his face. “In my defence— I forget that I’m followed around.”

“But no,” Dream mutters, “That’s not the big deal, the big deal was the shirt you were wearing?”

“Huh?” Wilbur says, “It was just a black t-shirt.” He looks around, “Like the one George is wearing.”

George laughs.

Tommy stares at Dream. “How did I miss this?”

“Not good at ya job,” Sapnap says. He’s now sitting on the grass, a drink held lazily half in his hand.

Tommy kicks him in the back.

Dream groans and runs a hand through his hair, he tries to dive bomb into a bush but manages to stand up straight. “Everyone likes your dumb lil’ face,” he mutters. “And then they saw like a forearm and freaked out because—”

He cuts himself off, like he’s legitimately just forgotten what he’s supposed to be saying.

“Oh, yeah,” Dream nods to himself before looking at Wilbur. “You always wear like—sweaters and then they see a forearm.”

Wilbur looks so incredibly confused.

Tommy would like to throw himself out of a window.

Techno also looks like he would like to throw himself out of a window.

“Anyway!” Dream announces, “I am fighting you.”

“Huh?” Wilbur says.

“On behalf of—” Dream staggers slightly, “I am so drunk holy shit— anyone I am fighting you Wilbur Scoot. This is for... I dunno Theseus? Do you still hate Theseus or are you over whatever emo arc you were doing?”

“I don’t hate Theseus.”

That’s news to Tommy if he’s being completely honest.

“Oh,” Dream looks a bit upset about that. “I’m fighting for… Tommy’s honour because—yeah.”

“That’s not—”

“I—” Dream says, and in no world is he standing even slightly straight. “Am gonna— fight you. For *my* honour. Yes, I am an independent man. I don’t need to fight for someone else’s honour, I am fighting for my honour and my pride.”

Dream is so incredibly drunk it’s almost painful.

Tommy shoots a grin at Techno, and his face softens a little bit at that.

Wilbur looks around, “Uh— that doesn’t seem like a good idea.”

“No, no, no,” Dream says, shaking his head and staggering over to the tree. “For my glory, for the glory of my family name— I challenge you to a duel, Wilbur Soot.”

Wilbur raises an eyebrow. “Dream I don’t think you even know your own name right now, let alone how to handle any sort of weapon.”

“Wrong!” Dream says, he reaches down and picks up a stick. It’s a pretty long stick if Tommy’s being completely honest. Dream twirls it around in a way that is actually rather impressive. “I am barely even— even drunk.”

He staggers to the side a little, to really prove that.

“You just said you were drunk,” Tommy deadpans. “About thirty seconds ago.”

“Dream I think this is the drunkest you’ve been since you turned eighteen,” Sapnap says from the background.

Dream’s mouth falls open and he points at Sapnap. “You! You traitor— you— you,” Dream looks like he’s going to start crying. “You’re also drunk!”

“I think you’re the drunkest one here,” Techno deadpans.

“Fuck you,” Dream mutters, “Fuck you, I hate all of you— apart from you Tommy, you’re cool. Fuck the rest of you— not literally, because heroes aren’t allowed to date which might be a hate crime but like did they ever consider if you don’t date someone and just kinda screw ‘em that’s not really against the rules, right?”

George sighs, “I’m going inside.”

“Fine!” Dream yells, “I don’t like you anyway!”

Sapnap pauses to look at him. “Then you won’t miss us.”

“I won’t!” Dream announces.

Everyone pauses for a moment, and shockingly enough Dream doesn’t burst into tears and he instead just looks at Wilbur before pointing the stick at him. “I’m gonna kill you.”

“With a blunt stick?”

“Yup,” Dream says. “Get ready Wimbluh Scott.”

“That’s not my name—”

“Wilbruh Scoot.”

“Also not my name—”

“Wimblur.”

“Nope.”

“Wimbledon.”

“You are somehow getting further and further away.”

“Windmill?”

“Okay this is just offensive—”

Dream grabs the stick, and points it at Wilbur again. “Wilbur. I am going to end your career, your bloodline and then I’m going to give all your money to Tommy.”

“Okay?” Wilbur says.

Dream twirls the stick around, Tommy's seen him do this movement in one of the training videos or somewhere— he does this before beating the shit out of with his bō and Tommy actually goes to say something.

Before he manages to hit himself in the face with the stick at quite a lot of force and he yells. Letting go of the stick.

The noise that Wilbur makes— is something that Tommy did not believe to be possible by a human being with human vocal chords because he laughs so hard that must hurt and doubles over clutching his stomach.

It is not a pretty laugh at all, it sounds a bit like a goose being strangled but it's endearing in some sort of way. Mostly because Tommy has never seen Wilbur laugh this hard and with this much force.

Dream is now bleeding... quite a lot from his forehead. Tommy appears to be the only one who's seen it, because he grabs some of the paper towel from on the table and runs over to Dream while Wilbur is still cackling.

"Hi, Tommy," Dream says. "That was cool."

"Uh— don't make a habit outta it," is what Tommy decides to say instead of any witty retort that comes to mind. "Yeah... probably don't be doin' that." He puts the scrunched up paper towel against Dream's forehead.

"Cool," Dream says. "I think I can get another scar y'know, on my face. Except this one— is like something I did rather than something someone else did."

"I— dunno how to unpack all of that," Tommy replies, vaguely aware of Puffy and Phil and Techno realising they should probably find a first aid kit.

“Basically,” Dream manages, “If a supervillain really hates you because you don’t have powers, what they’re gonna do first of all is kidnap you and second of all fuck up your face with a really, really blunt—”

“Okay!” Wilbur says, apparently having collected himself. “Maybe let’s not tell Tommy.”

Dream looks at Tommy, “But why, Tommy’s nice.”

“We don’t trauma dump on people while drunk,” Wilbur says like he’s explaining this to a child and Dream sighs like he’s a child who was just told why they can’t eat lollies for every meal. “We wait until we’re sober so we can weigh up whether that’s an awful decision.”

“How old are you?” Dream asks.

“Nineteen,” Tommy says easily.

“Oh you are too small,” Dream says, “A lil’ baby. You’re so young— why are you so young, get older? Right now because I asked you to.”

“Oh okay,” Tommy deadpans.

Puffy manages to take charge and she figures out Dream does not have a concussion, he’s just drunk and a bit silly and goofy. They patch up the mark on his forehead and Dream acts like he can do it.

Wilbur, Tommy and Techno go sit down at the now empty table.

They’re underneath the sheltered bit, which is lovely.

Tommy decides he can drink a couple more juice boxes and Techno takes it personally that there are any burgers left, so he starts assembling burgers for himself. Wilbur just sits there watching Dream getting patched up.

He tries to put the bandaid on his forehead and instead what he does is manage to almost get it on his eye, and Puffy quickly takes charge again.

When he's all patched up Dream manages to walk back over to Wilbur who is sitting underneath the sheltered part. He almost trips over his own feet and looks like he almost absolutely is about to stack it.

"I think I bet you in that fight, Dreamie."

"Okay *Casper*," Dream says, he's swaying slightly and he holds onto Techno's shoulder who seems less than impressed about this. "You should—" everyone watches with interest as Dream tries to get his brain cells working. "Yeah," Dream finishes weakly. "I'm gonna fall now."

And true enough to his word, he starts leaning dangerously in the other direction and Techno catches him with a sigh. "I am not dealing with him."

Wilbur glances around before taking a few steps back. "I think you'd find you are."

"I'll just give him to George."

"Yeah," Dream adds tiredly, "George! Woo! Where's George, I miss him— it's been so long since I've seen him. Where's Sapnap? I miss Sapnap, it's been even longer I miss him..." Dream pauses again.

Then he bursts into tears.

Tommy did not think another human could physically frown more, yet here Techno is.

Dream has tears rolling from his eyes which stop when they reach the top of his face mask. “I just— I just miss my friends so much.”

“Dream you saw them like ten minutes ago.”

“I miss them!” Dream slumps more and Techno has to try a bit harder to hold him up. “Where are they? I miss them, I want my—” he stops to hiccup but it sounds a little bit more like a sob. “I love them so much. I love them so much— they’re so incredible and awesome and I miss Sapnap.”

Techno sigh. It seems that he’s almost used to this but he is in no way happy about it. With a sigh he shakes his head and manages to adjust Dream so he’s standing up slightly more upright and doesn’t look like he’s about to topple.

“C’mon,” Techno says, “Let’s find your friends, they’re inside.”

“Yay!” Dream throws both his arms up in the air, “Thank you Techno.”

Techno just sighs a bit more aggressively.

Wilbur laughs as they walk off, before leaning against the table and looking at Tommy. Tommy swishes his drink around the glass, he feels like a movie character when he does that and he’s not sure why.

Tommy glances up and out at the sky.

It’s a beautiful golden colour, the clouds are pink and clouds form around the sun in a beautiful mix of shades. Tommy stares at it, his mouth falling open. He bumps Wilbur’s shoulder and he looks up.

“Woah,” Wilbur says and— yeah, yeah that about sums it up.

The sky looks like liquid golden, and that’s not a phrase that Tommy uses lightly. It’s almost sparkling and this is a sunset better than most, and it appears they both know it.

Sam has his phone out and is taking a photo but they all know that won’t be better than the real thing.

Wilbur looks at the clouds again, dusted with orange and pinks and golden and even purples if they look hard enough. Before he puts down his drink and stands up a little straighter. “Phil!” He shrieks.

Phil looks up.

“Where’s the ladder?”

“Round the side of the house,” Phil replies and he must know better than to ask questions because he looks back at what he’s doing.

“Okay!” Wilbur yells, and he runs off again, giving Tommy a look that tells him to stay there, and so Tommy does, sipping his drink as he hears the general destruction that lies in the path of Wilbur Soot.

He hits the ladder against the side of the house no less than three times, and almost knocks it through a window.

Ah, what a man.

With great difficulty he manages to set up a ladder, and it's a bit more wobbly than it should probably be, and Sam looks like he's going to have a heart-attack looking at it but it's Wilbur's through and through and he's grinning.

"Wanna see the sunset?" Wilbur asks.

Tommy hesitates a few moments, before walking over to the ladder. His arms are crossed and he stares up at the ladder. It leads up to a small section of sloped roof, the slope isn't awful but Tommy... could feel better about it.

"That will break."

"No, no," Wilbur says, and like the absolute dumb of ass he is, he starts climbing the ladder which creaks concerningly as he scales up the ladder. Tommy squints at it and Wilbur climbs.

Somehow, by a miracle of Prime, Wilbur makes it up there in one piece.

Tommy sighs. "No way!"

"Tommy—" Wilbur drags out the word, "It is worth it."

With a sigh, Tommy steps up onto the first rung. Slowly he steps the rungs, ones at a time and he tries not to shake too much. His heart is not handling this whole, ladder thing, very well because it feels like if it beats much harder it will remove itself from his chest.

Eventually, with shaky legs he manages to make it so he's basically standing on the rooftop. Wilbur looks at him and Tommy tries to calm his heart down.

"Hi," Tommy says, he tries to sound casual and fails miserably. Wilbur raises an eyebrow. "Just... need a moment, I don't really like heights."

And Wilbur sits there, patiently, like he understands.

Tommy manages to clamber so he's in a half crouch on the edge of the roof and he can feel his heart plummet inside of his chest.

He's okay— he's alright, he is fine. Nothing is happening to him and he's safe where he is. He is okay.

Tommy manages to put on a brave face, before glancing out back at the sun again. It looks lovely— and somehow that manages to calm Tommy down just enough that he doesn't burst into tears.

Wilbur grins, he's still sitting on the roof but he's also smiling at Tommy and his eyes look so soft that Tommy's not sure if he could deny this. Not now— not for a while. The sky is orange and Wilbur looks alive.

And maybe for once Tommy can be alive with it.

“Don't let me fall.”

“I won't.”

And Tommy... thinks he means it.

Wilbur smiles, holding out his hand, which Tommy takes. The roof is on enough of a lean that Tommy stumbles and sure enough Wilbur steadies him as he tries to sit down. His legs are shaking and he doesn't want to fall.

Wilbur will not let Tommy fall— the same can not be said about Theseus, or if he found out that he was Theseus. But right now, just two people who want to see a cool sunset? Wilbur

will make sure he doesn't fall.

Tommy laughs, "On a rooftop, what will you do?"

Wilbur rolls his eyes, and knocks his shoulder against Tommy's. It doesn't hurt, it's just teasing. Tommy rolls his eyes right back, before leaning against Wilbur, it's supposed to be aggressive but just comes off as brotherly.

"Kid?" Wilbur says and Tommy looks at him.

Wilbur smiles, it's his Tommy Smile... he's not sure when Wilbur got one of those, but he has it now and Tommy's still not sure if he deserves to be smiled at like that, but he is, and that's what really matters.

"So—" Wilbur drawls and Tommy glances over at him. "What do you wanna do when you grow up?"

Tommy gives him a look.

"I mean— you don't wanna work in the tower forever." Wilbur leans back and Tommy does the same. "I mean Phil and I won't be there forever."

"Huh?"

"Contract runs out in two years," Wilbur snorts. "His runs out in three. Techno— well it's literally his prison sentence. We think we can buy his way out though."

Tommy gives him a look. "Does Techno know that?"

Wilbur shrugs, "Probably. We haven't told him but he knows us— and that's kinda the same thing. Throw money at problems and they eventually go away."

Tommy hums looking out at the sunset, the clouds are pink and orange and they look like they're on fire. The clouds surround the horizon and they cluster around the slowly setting sun.

Everything is golden around them, golden hour really came through this time. Because it looks like everything is interlaced with golden, the rooftop they're precariously sitting on, the way they're sitting together, it's all golden—

Wilbur also falls silent next to him, and it seems that he's also watching the sunset with a curiosity, like he's never seen one before.

"I think I want an apartment in Upper L'Manberg," Tommy says thoughtfully, "I don't think I wanna live there— but I want an apartment there. So I can say 'hey look, I did it!' Maybe spit on some graves while I'm at it."

Wilbur laughs at that, a full body laugh, doubling himself over and wheezing like Tommy's said the funniest thing in the world— he hasn't, they both know that.

Tommy smiles, looking out across the roof as Wilbur basically dies of laughter next to him.

"What else?" Wilbur says, "Do you want a dog or an apartment with Daniel or—" he trails off.

"Dunno..." Tommy says, "I never really... thought much about the future, my entire life was just kinda surviving until the next day. I didn't think I'd make it long enough to envision some sort of future for myself. Futures feel like they're for the rich, for the fortunate and for the people who can pause for a moment y'know?"

Wilbur nods, because of course he does, and his eyes show that he's listening. He's listening and Tommy is speaking and Wilbur's just... here.

"And—" Tommy opens his mouth and closes it again. "I still don't really think I can see myself beyond a couple of days. Like— even when I was a kid my classmates would talk about getting married or becoming a doctor or an actor and I just... didn't."

Tommy sighs, running a hand through his hair.

"And I dunno if that's telling of my childhood or what. But... I dunno I don't see a world where I'm married and in a white picket house with my very nuclear family. I don't see a world where I can make it to my twentieth birthday."

Wilbur hums, "What do you want?"

"Huh?"

"Like more than anything? If you could have one thing, for your future what would it be?"

"Happy." Tommy mutters, "I— I want to be happy and I want my life to be more than just happy moments within the overwhelming sad. I wanna— wake up and know it'll be a good day."

"Do you know something that might help with that?" And it's not pushing, and it's gentle and Tommy knows that it's asked out of his best interests.

'I'd tell you I'm Theseus' is what he doesn't say, despite the pull in his chest and the way he actually opens his mouth. He can imagine this scenario, he just tells Wilbur, he just tells him and Wilbur takes it well and then that's the end of that.

He doesn't say that. He wants to.

He wants to start talking about how he's Theseus and how he's scared he might lose all of this — whatever this is, and people he loves will get dragged down with him.

Prime, he wants to tell Wilbur more than he's wanted to tell anyone anything in his life before. He wants to so badly it pulls on his chest.

It hurts so badly, the want— the need to tell him that he actually opens his mouth.

"Wil, I think I should tell you something—"

"Yeah?"

"And I— and I don't want you to think of me differently for it or for it to make it weird but I know that might not also happen and I think I'm finally okay with it."

Tommy takes a deep breath.

Then he realises that he's a fucking idiot, what the fuck is he doing?

He can't tell Wilbur he's Theseus— not on a rooftop of all things and now he's put himself in a weird situation because he needs to say something.

Tommy needs something to say and he needs it quickly. His heart is in his throat and he needs something to say—

"I see you like a brother," he blurts out.

And... he's not sure if he means it.

That almost makes it worse. He has no clue if he means that or he's just saying it out of a panic but he says it anyway.

Wilbur looks at him like he's about to cry.

"Tommy—"

"Of course I get it because I'm like your employee and you're also a superhero and I'm just some child but like— I can't help it and maybe it's made things odd because... of course it might have but I really needed to say it because it has kinda been eating away at me for the past— well a while and again I really just kinda had to say it and I'm sorry because I have no control over it and you probably don't want a brother like me anyway—"

"Tommy," Wilbur says and it takes one word to shut him up and Tommy's not sure when that happened, but it happened.

"Yeah I'll shut up now," Tommy mutters, he draws his knees to his chest. "Sorry." He mutters because he doesn't know what else to say.

"I think the same way," Wilbur says, "Of course— I get attached to people easier— I think, and you're honestly the person with the most little brother energy of anyone I've ever met."

"I am not."

"You totally are," Wilbur continues like nothing happened, "And— yeah I dunno. One day I thought of you like a brother, like... someone who I would do just about anything to keep safe and someone who I'd... I dunno talk until two in the morning about nothing or would drop myself off a cliff to keep safe."

"That seems a bit drastic."

Wilbur just shrugs, there's a faint smile on his face, "I'm a pretty dramatic person Tommy."

"Really?" Tommy fake gasps, "That's unlike you— you, Wilbur Soot, professional theatre kid?"

"Oh fuck right off," Wilbur mutters.

Tommy just laughs, it's a full laugh.

Huh... brothers.

He glances at Wilbur and prays he doesn't notice, and he doesn't. He just watches the sunset like there's no worries in the world, and Tommy can almost believe that there aren't none. It's just him and Wilbur watching a sunset because they can, and it's pretty and they shouldn't waste a pretty sunset.

Brothers.

He thinks he can get used to that.

Tommy smiles to himself, for the first time in what feels like years and looks out at the sunset with Wilbur.

He shuffles an inch closer to Wilbur, before taking a deep breath. For some reason his nerves have got him, and he knows it will be fine because it's always fine. It's just Wilbur. That's all there is to it.

Once again he glances at Wilbur, before swallowing his pride.

And he lays his head against Wilbur's shoulder, it's slow and uncertain and he's not sure if Wilbur will do anything or say anything about it. But he doesn't.

It really is that simple.

Two brothers sit on a roof— and they watch a sunset.

It's quiet for a moment, and it's just the two of them. It's peaceful and quiet and it's... nice, that's the word for it.

There's the faint sound of the music that's playing inside and people chattering, Puffy, Sam and Phil are still trying to clean some of the burnt bits off the barbeque and the cool night air is biting at Tommy's skin.

It's lovely.

"So," Wilbur says, "The party alright then?"

Tommy scrunches up his nose, "I mean I'm not the biggest fan of drunk people but it was nice," Tommy glances back at the house and watches as Techno struggles to get Dream to step into the house without tripping over the sliding door frame. "But... they're all nice, I'm not really used to that."

"People not being dicks when drunk?"

"Yeah," Tommy says slowly, "In my experience they get meaner. Everyone here gets happier or funnier or just generally sweeter. Like—" Tommy takes a deep breath and holds onto his drink tighter. He can do this, he can open up about his family on his own accord. He can do this. His fingers go white from where they're pressing on the glass but he can do this. "My parents didn't get drunk a lot, but when they did they were a lot meaner than usual. I guess that kinda... warped my perception? Now I assume everyone's like that, and I know in my head that's not true but it doesn't feel true y'know?"

Wilbur nods, he's listening to Tommy. Really listening, and somehow that's all Tommy needs at this moment.

"Like I don't think I'll ever drink," Tommy looks down at his orange juice and smiles, "Apart from orange juice because I don't want to lose that control. But... I dunno it's nice to know that people are kinder than my childhood told me?"

Wilbur smiles.

It's a proud smile that reaches either side of his face, and there's a soft sort of fondness in his eyes that Tommy hasn't really seen directed at him before— not by Wilbur at least. And Tommy wishes he could take a photo of the smile because he's not sure if this same level of fondness will last forever.

"I'm proud," Wilbur says, as if those very words won't make Tommy break down into tears. "Of you for telling me that, it can't have been easy. And I'm glad, I'm glad we can help you understand that maybe people are nicer than you think they are."

Tommy smiles back, and he feels the same fondness Wilbur just gave him a moment ago play on his own face.

Wilbur flings an arm around Tommy's shoulders and pulls him in for a half hug.

Tommy relishes it.

He loosens the hug, but leaves his arm flung around Tommy's shoulders and he grins as he does so. "Come on, I want a video of drunk Dream crying when he sees George again."

Tommy stands up first, and he gets his footing quickly.

Wilbur stands up a moment later, and decides he's going to try to plummet off the side of the roof because he loses his footing.

Tommy grabs him by the arm, "We can't have you fallin'."

"Huh—" Wilbur laughs, "And I said I was the one who was gonna catch you."

So with that sense of finality, they climb down the ladder. Tommy doesn't freak out as much this time because Wilbur is standing at the bottom of the ladder and he knows that he'll catch him.

And with that they go inside.

Inside it's a bit louder and a lot more overwhelming, a lot of people are talking at once and a lot of things are happening. Quackity is being loud in general— more so than usual, Karl is laying upside down on the couch with his legs hanging over the back of the couch. Sapnap is... laying face down on the floor, Tommy thinks he's okay.

Some people are playing what looks like wii sport on some dusty old wii set that is whirring like it might explode, a couple people are singing, people are still eating and all of it is a bit much.

Purpled apparently sees the rising panic on Tommy's face because he grabs his arm and drags him down the hallway.

They sit down at the end of the hallway, Purpled with crossed legs and Tommy sits against the wall letting his legs go out straight in front of him. He leans his head against the wall and sighs.

"Juicebox?" Purpled says, offering a half drunk juicebox.

Tommy takes it.

It's not super amazing, but it's not terrible either and Tommy would like to believe that counts for something. He sighs and crumples up the juicebox before throwing it at the wall and it bounces in a satisfying way.

"Another?" Purpled holds out another, undrunken juicebox.

"Where are you getting these from?" Tommy says but he takes it anyway.

He decides to take this one a bit slower and Purpled seems pretty fucking grateful about that, which makes Tommy want to laugh a lot.

"Had fun?" Tommy asks.

Purpled nods, "I got to watch Dream cry when he saw his friends again, probably a top ten moment of my life."

Tommy huffs with laughter, "Wilbur said he was proud of me."

"Oh." Purpled says slowly, "And is that a good thing?"

"Dunno..." Tommy trails off, "I talked about my parents, like willingly I knew I was doing it rather than just trying to one-up someone. I talked about them and then he said he was proud of me for doing so and he smiled at me."

"He... smiled at you? That seems pretty normal—"

“Ughh,” Tommy runs his hands down his face and slumps down against the wall. “You don’t get it, it was the fondest thing I’ve ever seen y’know? And he just looked like... so happy that he knew me and so happy that I was talking about them and I felt comfortable doing so.”

“Okay?” Purpled says slowly, “What’s wrong with that?”

“Because I want to keep that,” Tommy says and hates the way his voice cracks just a little bit. “And I know as soon as he finds out I’m Theseus that will disappear and I’m not sure how I’m going to cope with that.”

Purpled falls quiet, which normally means he’s not listening so Tommy looks up from his feet.

Instead Purpled is thinking, thinking really hard, like it might actually hurt him to be thinking this hard. He hums for a moment, before crossing his arms and leaning against the wall again. Once again— Tommy doesn’t know what to think.

Purpled opens his mouth and closes it, and Tommy’s actually shocked about how much he’s trying.

“Okay...” Purpled says, “Maybe. Maybe he will hate you.”

“Helpful,” Tommy deadpans.

“Look, Toms, I’m not gonna lie to you,” Purpled says, “He might hate you for things you’ve done. But I think— when you really care about someone, I mean *really* care about them. It doesn’t matter, because they are them. I don’t think you’d hold it against me for too long if... I dunno I was working for Elysium. Maybe you’d care for a bit, but I don’t think you’d hate me forever because of it.”

“Wilbur isn’t that similar to me,” Tommy mutters, he hugs his knees to his chest.

That makes Purpled laugh, “Tommy. I like to think I know you the best out of anyone, you and Wilbur are much more similar than either of you would like to hear.”

Tommy sighs.

“If someone really, really cares about you,” Purpled says, “They will never really hate you. And the bad will never *really* overshadow all the good you did on their life— I—”

Tommy has the feeling this is about to become a personal talk and Purpled is going to use his emotions right now. So he sits up and makes sure he’s listening, he makes sure that Purpled knows he’s listening and he knows that he cares more than anything in the entire world.

“Punz,” Purpled says the word like it hurts him to say— and it probably does. “When he left... I thought I’d hate him forever, I thought I would spend every waking moment wishing he was gone, wishing I’d never met him. But despite all the wrong he did, he was still my brother. He still kept me safe, he still protected me from our abuser when he could. He taught me how to fight and how to laugh and how to hide and how to be a person— and— I can’t hate him. And I think that’s probably the worst part about it, because I want to hate him, really I do. I just can’t bring myself to it. He meant too much to me for too long.”

“I hate my parents.” Tommy mutters, “I think— I don’t know, it’s complicated,” he sighs and slumps down against the wall even more that it hurts his back. “I hate what they did to me— I will always hate what they did to me and I will hate them for it.”

“And that’s okay,” Purpled says, “They hurt you...”

“I—” Tommy takes a deep breath. “I’m scared that Wilbur or Phil or Dream or anyone—even Techno, even you some days. Will look at me and see what I saw when I looked at my dad. Just... coldness— nothing there. I’m scared that they’ll hate me the way I hate my parents.”

“Maybe they will,” Purpled says again, ever the negotiator. “But I think... if you care about someone and they care about you. Then it’s hard to hate them, not impossible, but it’s difficult.”

Tommy doesn't say anything for a long moment.

"Do you reckon my parents cared about me?" He says.

Purpled stares at him for a long moment, he opens and closes his mouth and once again it looks like he's really thinking, like he knows these words count and he wants to make sure they don't hurt Tommy.

Part of Tommy is grateful Purpled cares so much how he uses his words and the other part of him hates it... just a little bit.

"I think... I think they used to," Purpled eventually decides on. "Or they thought they did. I don't think by the time they died they cared, but they thought they did."

Tommy crosses his arms and stares at the wall in front of him.

"We are being way too emotionally vulnerable."

"It's like one in the morning," Purpled says, and there's a smile in his voice. "That is peak time for emotional vulnerability."

"I'd say three in the morning hits differently."

"I'll hit you differently," Purpled mutters.

That manages to get a full laugh out of Tommy, he tilts his head back as he laughs this time. "Okay..." Tommy says once he gets his laughter together and manages to keep a straight face every time he looks at Purpled. "I'm gonna go now... thank you... just in general, for everything."

Purpled pulls a face.

“I wouldn’t be here without you,” Tommy says.

Purpled looks at him, in the eyes, it’s something rare he does, he’s a bit like Ranboo in that regard. He looks him in the eyes for a few moments longer than he usually would.

Then he smiles. “I’m glad I met you,” Purpled says. “Even if you’re a little bitch. I’m glad I met you, I also don’t think I’d be here without you.”

Tommy smiles back again, this time it’s bigger and louder and it almost hurts his face. He holds out a hand to Purpled, and Purpled takes it the way he always does.

“Ready to bust out some sick moves?” Tommy says and he does a little shoulder shimmy.

Purpled sighs, he sounds more than tired. “You can’t dance Tommy.”

“I can!” Tommy lies, “I am an amazing dancer!”

“You dance like a Club Penguin character.”

“How do you even know what Club Penguin is? Neither of us had childhoods.”

“I had to catch up somehow, you dance like one of the characters,” Purpled sighs at him and Tommy grins back.

“Let’s dance.”

“We’re not dancing, Tommy,” Purpled says.

Tommy frowns.

“Don’t give me that look, I’m not letting you embarrass yourself.”

“Fine,” Tommy groans.

They manage to get out into the lounge room again, it’s a bit quieter.

More notably, Dream is laying face down on the floor.

Sapnap is sitting on the couch like he owns the entire thing. His legs are thrown over George and Karl’s and he stares up at the roof like it’s specifically wronged him.

“I think,” Dream says into the floor. “I think people should write eyes as orbs more.”

“Literally why—” George says.

“Funny,” Sapnap adds, “Humorous.”

“Can have a lil’ giggle,” Karl says.

Tommy and Purpled glance at each other.

Techno sighs.

“Or they should say seeing balls,” Dream mutters. “His bright green seeing balls scanned her up and down, like that’s incredible and I love it.” He looks around for a moment before his eyes land on Tommy, “Tommy make that happen.”

“Uh—”

Dream looks at Tommy for a long moment.

He bursts into tears again.

Wilbur who is sitting on a beanbag in the corner looks concerned to say the least but he still sips at his water.

“You’re just—” Dream says, “You’re *so* cool, you’re funny and you’re smart and—” Dream interrupts himself to cry a little bit. “I love you, you’re the literal coolest nineteen-year-old I’ve ever met... don’t tell Fundy. You can like... use a gun or somethin’, I’ve seen you do that. And you’re super smart and you’re like super nice sometimes and everyone loves you so much and—”

He gets up off the floor and walks over to Tommy and puts his hands on both of his shoulders, he’s swaying a little and Tommy is scared he’ll have to catch him.

He looks in Tommy’s eyes and nods, there’s a certain level of seriousness and sincerity on his face. “You... are incredible,” he says, “You are so fuckin’ incredible and you are so loved and cared for and—”

Tommy looks at Wilbur for help.

Wilbur appears to debate if he should help, before standing and grabbing Dream lightly by the shoulder. Dream looks at him and frowns.

“It’s Casper!” Dream immediately lightens up. “Wilbur you are so cool, you are literally the coolest. I am very glad that I got to grow up with you, you’re like— so cool even if you stole toys from the hospital that one time.”

“Wait, what?” Someone— probably Foolish says.

Wilbur laughs nervously, “Okay.”

“But you’re so cool,” Dream says, “Yeah you’re a bit traumatised but that’s okay I love you anyway.”

“Okay,” Wilbur laughs, “Let’s sit back down.”

Dream frowns before sitting exactly on the floor where he was standing and he glares up at Wilbur. Tommy isn’t exactly sure how he’s supposed to be feeling about all of this, but it appears to work.

Wilbur and Tommy exchange a glance.

Dream sighs, before laying down flat on his back like a starfish, he stares up at the roof. It looks like he’s having several crises all at once and Tommy can appreciate that he stuck them all together.

Tommy takes a few steps back as does Wilbur.

The rest of the night passes surprisingly smoothly for the several disasters that have happened.

Phil decides that everyone is sleeping over, which is rather impressive because he does not have nearly enough bedrooms to accommodate everyone.

Dream, Sapnap, George, Karl and Quackity somehow manage to squeeze themselves onto the couch, which in itself is a fucking miracle even if the couch got turned into a bed. The five of them look so uncomfortable it's not even funny.

Tommy eventually figures out he's being put in a room with Purpled and Techno, which is an interesting dynamic. And then Wilbur feels left out so he decides to join.

The room they end up getting put in seems like it's Wilbur's childhood room. There's still some stuff around that tells them this, but most of it has been taken away. It's a bit dusty in some bits and probably doesn't get a lot of sunlight.

Wilbur screws his nose up at the room. "Ew." He says.

It's all painted light blue, and it's a bit scrappy in some places and Tommy has a feeling that Wilbur might have had something to do with that. The wall has the remains of glow in the dark star stickers, that have since been ripped off the wall. The remains are there and that makes Tommy smile a little bit.

On the wall is a lot of space things, pictures from space— old ones, drawings and little scientific diagrams of star's cores and general other nerd shit. They're all very well done, and Tommy for some reason feels like Phil got them.

The bookshelf stuffed in the corner is full with books, most of them are fantasy books from when he's a kid. The type teenagers read, some of them are for younger kids. Some of them are large space books that Tommy would always want but he could never buy.

Tommy walks over to the bookcase and he picks up one of them. It's a book, just some fantasy novel. He flips the first page open and smiles at it, it has handwriting that is a mess in it.

Happy 12th birthday!

Love you lots, please don't burn the pasta again.

- *Phil*

1. *I got you a trampoline look outside.*

Tommy manages a smile at this, there's a crease on the front page. Like Wilbur dropped the book as soon as he found out about the trampoline, it's so childish— and makes so much sense for Wilbur even now.

Tommy coos at it, much to Wilbur's horror.

"Aww... Wilbur," Tommy says.

"No, shut up," Wilbur decides to throw something at Tommy and he grabs the first thing he can, which is a pillow.

It goes to hit Purpled, who doesn't even look up from his phone and catches it with one hand. He looks at Wilbur with the most deadpan expression on his face.

Wilbur seems to cower at that and he goes quiet.

"Did you like the trampoline?" Tommy asks.

Wilbur glares at him. "Yes."

“Can you do a flip?”

Wilbur pauses for a moment. “On a trampoline I can.”

Techno raises an eyebrow. “I watched you sprain your ankle from jumping off the couch.”

“I did that?” Wilbur says.

“Yup. The day after you turned fifteen,” Techno says casually. “You cried.”

Purpled laughs.

He gets weird looks from Wilbur and Techno which makes Purpled make his expression somehow look even more deadpan. “Hey Toms what were you doin’ when you were fifteen?”

“Last year?”

“I will never get used to you being sixteen—” Wilbur says.

“Uh... last year I was mostly just... working at a cafe. I had a job at the place Ranboo works — and I worked at that book place downtown.”

“Did you quit?” Techno asks, “You had three jobs and then you went for a job interview and got it?”

“Uh— book place shut down, cafe fired me and I pissed off the manager at the supermarket and stopped getting given shifts and so I quit.”

“How did you get fired?” Purpled asks.

Tommy looks down at the floor, “Uh— I threw a coffee back at someone.”

“You— threw coffee back at someone.” Techno repeats slowly.

Tommy nods, “Yeah it hit them in the head.”

Techno just sighs, and Tommy beams back at him.

Eventually they manage to get settled, and by settled that means Tommy and Purpled get to sleep on some blankets thrown on the floor while Techno and Wilbur share the double bed. Techno doesn’t appear to be overly happy about this.

“I hate sharing a bed with you,” Techno groans, he takes off his prosthetic which he leans against the wall. “You sleep like a fuckin’ starfish.”

“Cope with it,” Wilbur mutters.

“You’re hoggin’ the blanket!” Techno says.

Tommy can hear them fighting over the blanket, and he just looks at Purpled. There’s actual amusement in Purpled’s eyes which is honestly hilarious, Tommy sits up and tries to spot what they’re doing in the darkness.

The answer is they’re fighting over the blankets.

“Give it back you bastard—” Wilbur says.

Tommy flops back onto the bed and stares up at the roof like he's having a crisis and a half because it kinda feels like he is. Purpled also already seems tired of this.

He sighs, before picking up his blankets. "I am sleeping in the hallway," Purpled decides, "And no, Tommy you're not allowed to join me."

He shuffles out of the room in what looks like a burrito blanket and they all listen as Purpled thumps against the floor on the other side of the wall. Something that actually manages to get Tommy to snicker into his hand.

Techno sighs, "Wilbur, sleep on the floor."

"No, fuck you, this is my childhood room."

"I do not care," Techno appears to tug at the blanket again. "I am not putting my prosthetic back on and I'm not going to hop down to the floor. Even if I did how the fuck would I get up again?"

"I have seen you stand up without your prosthetic," Wilbur complains. "You can't only decide you *need* your prosthetic when it suits you."

"I need it all the time," Techno defends.

This argument is actually pretty interesting.

"Well apparently not," Wilbur argues, "Because I have seen you roundhouse kick someone without it."

"I was holding onto the roof beams!"

“You still did it,” Wilbur snaps back.

Tommy stares up at the roof in the dark room. If this is what people feel like when he and Purpled are arguing then he should probably issue a formally apology to them because what the fuck is this?

Eventually after even more bickering they seem to find themselves a deal and they fall quiet a few moments later.

Tommy also finds himself drifting.

Ah... finally some peace and fucking quiet—

He sleeps well, which is honestly rather rare for him. Not amazingly because he wakes up at like seven in the morning.

Wilbur is no longer in bed and Techno is snoring.

Tommy untangles himself from the mess that are his blankets and his legs and he manages to stand up. His legs are a bit shaky— probably because he slept in jeans like a fuckin’ weirdo.

He wipes the sleep from his eyes and manages to stumble down the stairs, he’s surprised he doesn’t fall down the last ones.

Wilbur is sitting at the island counter drinking coffee. He looks at Tommy and raises an eyebrow. “Weird of you to be up.”

“You too,” Tommy mutters, he sits on the stool next to Wilbur and leans his head against the counter. “Techno snores so fuckin’ loudly.”

Wilbur laughs, “I’d say.”

Tommy goes quiet and appreciates the coolness of the counter on his forehead. It’s quiet and lovely. He can hear faint snoring from the lounge room and he can hear someone shuffling about upstairs.

“Who did we lose overnight?” Tommy mutters.

“Niki went home, Foolish moved into the lounge room with the rest of them. Uh— Puffy went home, Sam did not. Fundy’s... somewhere, Kristin is also somewhere.”

“She stayed the night?”

“Yeah,” Wilbur rubs at his eyes, “That’s the reason I didn’t get my own room. Because Phil was being all polite and a simp so he gave Kristin the last spare room. Which is why Purpled fuckin’ slept in the hallway.”

“I think he slept there because he was sick of you and Techno arguing.”

Wilbur hums for a moment. “Maybe.”

Tommy rolls his eyes, “I saw him like on a roof beam before, I believe in him.”

“Why the fuck would he—”

“Hello,” someone says and Tommy manages to look up from his head being on the table. It is... Kristin.

Apparently she's the only one with a brain cell to wear something different to what she came to the party in, because she's wearing track pants and what looks like a Mario shirt. More importantly, she is carrying the only dog ever, Floof.

"Floof!" Tommy says.

Floof seems to recognise him because he yaps happily.

Kristin puts Floof on the counter, which probably isn't hygienic and Phil will yell at them later, but for now it doesn't matter because the bestest boy is here.

Floof seems very excited to see him because he walks up to Tommy and starts trying to attack him with attention. He jumps up so he's standing on his hind legs and has his front legs against Tommy's chest.

Then he tries to lick Tommy's face, which while Tommy loves Floof he does not want dog slobber on his face. Not at the moment when he woke up about three seconds ago. Floof doesn't seem to be a fan of that, so he does a small polite bark.

"This dog is fuckin' spoiled."

"As he should be," Tommy says with a glare. "Hi Floof... how are you Floof?"

Floof does a cute little doggy spin, and a moment later there are more footsteps down the stairs.

Purpled walks down the stairs, with a blanket over his head, and he looks like he is just going to walk around like a blanket burrito for the entire day, which is honestly a vibe that Tommy can get behind.

He looks up at Tommy, with just... the hatred of a thousand suns. "My back hurts."

“Maybe you shouldn’t sleep on the floor.”

“I hate you,” Purpled announces, “I hope you choke on your own saliva.”

“I hope you fall down the stairs and slightly twist your ankle, just enough that it’s uncomfortable but you don’t need to go to the doctor.”

Purpled just looks at him.

“Wilbur.”

“Yes?”

“Do you take requests for children you kick off of roofs?” Purpled says with a pointed glare at Tommy. “I will pay you.”

Wilbur looks at Tommy, “Okay— Tommy I love you but—”

“You’d throw me off a roof?” Tommy screeches.

“How much money?” Wilbur asks.

“Like...” Purpled pauses to think, “At least a couple thousand grand.”

Wilbur looks at Tommy, before putting a hand on his shoulder. “I am sorry Tommy, but for that much money you’re getting yeeted.”

“You’re a millionaire!” Tommy yells, “You don’t need the money.”

“No, no, no,” Wilbur shakes his head, “My *dad’s* a millionaire.” He glances at Kristin, “Again, Phil is very rich I could totally organise bumping him off if you want his money Kristin.”

Kristin raises an eyebrow, “You’re not getting your inheritance at this rate.”

Wilbur pauses for a moment, “Nah— Phil loves me too much. I could murder a man and he’d be like,” Wilbur pauses and clears his throat, before letting out his best Phil imitation (which isn’t very good.) “ *‘That’s alright mate, did they deserve it?’* And I would be like, duh of course they did and then—”

“That imitation was shit,” Purpled says.

Even the makes Floof seem to stop spinning around on the counter and look at Purpled. Everyone looks at Purpled and he shrugs. “Phil’s accent is more of a merged one.”

“Okay, I’d like to see you do better.” Wilbur mutters.

Purpled just looks at him, looking completely dead behind the eyes in a way that is fucking hilarious and he loves more than anything. He clears his throat, “Okay this might be off it’s been a while since I’ve had to copy someone’s voice but, *‘you alright there mate?’*”

And he says it in a perfect imitation of Phil’s voice.

Wilbur actually drops his phone in shock and even Floof seems confused because he’s looking around for Phil. Kristin’s mouth is fully open and she might as well be collecting her jaw off the floor.

Tommy shrugs, “That was okay.”

“Bitch I swear to Ender and also Prime—” Purpled starts

Tommy just flips him off.

The morning is actually very calming, people slowly filter out of the house. With varying degrees of hangovers, lack of sleep and other various ailments. George complains the entire time that he has a shift after, Dream says that he can suck it up and George responds by throwing a book at him.

Other than that most people leave relatively peacefully, filtering out in the early morning.

Eventually, after about— everyone has left.

Techno drags himself from his bed and down the stairs (Tommy has the sneaking suspicion that’s intentional). He looks like he needs about a litre of coffee and beelines straight for the machine.

“Hi Techno,” Wilbur says.

Techno just makes a grunt back.

"Mornin' to you too," Wilbur mutters over his coffee. In return he's met with an odd look from Techno.

Techno manages to pour his coffee before grabbing sugar and just... tipping in half of it. Kristin and Wilbur look on in horror.

"That is not coffee," Wilbur whispers. "What the fuck is that."

Techno drinks the entire thing in one go and sets it on the counter before collapsing onto one of the chairs next to Tommy.

"My leg, hates me," Techno whispers. "This is literally ableist."

"Is it still not on right?" Wilbur asks.

Techno just glares at him and it looks like if he wanted someone's head exploded then Wilbur would be dead on the floor. "Yeah I keep getting air in the sock bit, and a terrible phantom itch."

Purpled pulls a face, "What's a phantom itch?"

Techno sighs, "It's like phantom pain, except I need to itch my ankle on a leg I no longer have."

"Oh that sounds awful," Kristin says, "Having an itchy ankle is bad enough let alone not being able to scratch it."

Techno nods, before putting his head back on the counter. "Wilbur, make me toast."

"Make your own fucking toast."

"I'll kill you," Techno mutters, "I will take off my leg and beat you to death with it. Don't try me."

"You're an adult, make your toast."

"But my leg hurts," Techno complains, "My entire body hurts and I wanna go home and have a nap... but I would settle for some toast."

Wilbur sighs, "What do you want on it?"

"Jam please!"

Purpled and Tommy just look at each other.

Floof seems like he's had enough of this entire situation because he tries to launch himself off the counter.

Purpled catches him with one hand, before moving him so Floof is being carried like the most awkward baby ever. He doesn't seem impressed about it, to say the least.

Techno looks up. "He is an attack dog."

"He's a therapy dog," Wilbur and Tommy chorus at the same time.

"Attack."

Purpled responds by scratching Floof under the chin and he melts into it. "Ah yes, a ruthless attack dog." Floof makes various cute dog noises. He buries his head into Purpled's jumper.

And Purpled— the ruthless ex-mercenary whose name was feared in the underground world. The man who Tommy has watched fire guns perfectly and broken people's wrists...

He melts slightly, his face gets all soft and gentle when Floof decides to try and hide in his jumper.

Tommy takes a quick photo.

He gets a glare for it, but it's more than worth it.

"That's very sweet," Kristin says looking over Tommy's shoulder. "Daniel, I didn't know your face could be that gentle."

"You are lucky I have a dog right now," Purpled threatens. "Otherwise I'd beat your ass, Thomas."

Eventually, Techno gets his toast, Wilbur says he isn't hungry, Purpled eats the most sugar-packed cereal he can find and Tommy joins him.

Kristin is the only semi-competent adult apparently because she makes her own toast. And Tommy's upset that he now doesn't get toast.

Y'know who does get toast? Something that someone else made?

Philza.

He wakes up looking half like he was dragged through the mud. And then he manages to stumble into the kitchen.

"Would you like some toast?" Kristin asks.

"Uh— yes, yes." Phil says. He sits at the island counter as well. "Thank you that would be lovely."

"That would be love-lay," Techno mocks. He apparently decides he's sulking today because he walks out of the room, and gives Wilbur a dirty look. "Fuckin' British people," he mutters under his breath. He pauses by the door, "Tommy is the only valid British person here, the rest of you fuckin' suck."

He walks out.

Wilbur doesn't look even slightly bothered. "He's annoyed because Floof left him."

Floof yaps.

"Traitor," Wilbur says, scratching underneath his chin. Which Floof seems to relax into, "You're a cute traitor, I think he'll forgive you."

Floof does perhaps the cutest dog head tilt ever and looks at Wilbur. He does a little yap before tapping his arm.

"No, I'm not giving you treats."

Floof does not look overly happy about that and he glares. Well— Tommy's not even sure if dogs can glare but Floof is coming pretty close to it.

"These treats upset your stomach," Wilbur says trying to negotiate with a dog. "I don't even know why we still have them."

Floof just looks offended.

"It's not even your birthday yet," Wilbur says, "And if I give you these treats Techno is going to be upset with me."

"Give him the treats," Purpled says, cupping his hands around his mouth. "Techno can deal with the... shit."

Kristin just sighs, "Come on," she says gently. "There has to be something we can give him—look at his little eyes."

Tommy will confirm that Floof does have very cute puppy dog eyes.

Wilbur rolls his eyes.

As the morning continues people start wandering out, slowly but surely the house empties little by little.

Purpled leaves around the same time as Quackity because he has work, and has to duck back to the apartment. Dream, George and Sapnap all leave at the same time, because... Tommy thinks they have a patrol together, but he's not completely sure about that. Karl leaves with Foolish who leaves with Sam.

Phil agrees to give Kristin and Fundy a lift home and Wilbur has to be physically contained by Techno so he doesn't make a comment about the *'grandparents dropping off their grandson'*.

So that leaves a grand total of: Wilbur Soot, Techno and Floof the Dog. And Tommy's also there.

Techno goes out into the backyard... apparently to clean up but Wilbur theorises that he's just tired and going to have a nap in the hammock.

Wilbur attempts to make an omelette and Tommy sits down at the island counter. The chair closest to the wall.

“Excited to go home?” The omelette sizzles and Tommy privately thinks it’s going to burn. “It’s been a long day so— it’s Sunday too so that’s nice, you get a break until Monday.”

Tommy just sighs.

“You’re not?” Wilbur follows up.

Tommy leans his head against the wall, sighing a little. “Tubbo’s home.”

He doesn’t like the way his voice shakes a little— and he sure as fuck does not like the way that he can already imagine it. Going home— and he knows that won’t be ending well no matter how much he tries. Tubbo will get mad, Tommy will get sad and that cycle is going to complete until Tommy also gets mad.

Wilbur goes oddly quiet, he messes around with the fry pan for a bit more, before flipping the omelette with surprising accuracy for someone who apparently can’t cook. He takes a deep breath like he’s trying to steady himself.

Suddenly Tommy is about a thousand times more concerned.

“Tommy, what’s going on with Tubbo?”

“Huh?”

“I mean—” Wilbur takes a deep breath, “I heard the yelling, and I should’ve gone back and checked up. I knew something was wrong, and I did nothing. You look miserable that you have to go home to somewhere that Tubbo is.”

Tommy looks down at the floor.

“I—” Tommy keeps his eyes on the floor. “It’s fine.”

“Is it?” Wilbur says softly, and there’s no shoving, there’s no trying to get an actual answer out of him. There’s just genuine concern and a little bit of softness in his voice.

Wilbur goes quiet.

Tommy knows this is a psychology trick— stay silent so the other person fills the silence. He knows that, they both know that judging by the long looks they’re giving each other and the fact neither of them are willing to relent.

“Really,” Tommy says, “It’s fine Wil.”

Wilbur raises an eyebrow, “Tommy he didn’t come to the hospital, you were hurt. He’s your best friend right?”

“Was,” Tommy mutters, “Maybe he still is—” he runs his hands through his hair, “I don’t know! I don’t know anymore. He’s acted all weird and I feel like I’m at fault but I don’t know what I did, I never know what I do and people are always mad at me and I feel like I’m the problem because I have to be, right! In every situation I’m in when I can’t figure out why they’re mad at me I’m the common theme. I’m pretty good at figuring out what people are feeling, it’s kinda my job! But I don’t know and when I don’t know that makes it hard because how am I supposed to apologise when it’s my fault and I don’t know what I did!”

Tommy finishes the rant by standing up and turning to leave.

Wilbur hums softly, and somehow that makes Tommy turn around and stare at him. His eyes are remarkably gentle, and Tommy wants to hate that a little but he knows he can’t.

“I don’t think this is your fault, Tommy,” Wilbur says.

The omelette is burning but neither of them care.

“Then who’s fault is it?”

“Sometimes people are shitty,” Wilbur says and it’s said with a mix of experience and hurt. “Sometimes people suck, sometimes they’re dealing with things and they hurt the people around them. Sometimes they just— genuinely want the worst for everyone around them. You’re just one person Tommy, you’re not the sole cause of all evil in the world. You’re just —” Wilbur laughs, “You’re just a teenager.”

“He’s also a teenager.”

“Yeah!” Wilbur gestures around with the spatula, “And teenagers are the worst!” He actually laughs and Tommy manages a small smile. “Teenagers are the worst! My teenage years were probably the worst of my life! They are for most people.”

“Isn’t that a song?”

Wilbur’s face drops.

“Teenagers scare the living shit outta me,” Tommy sings.

Tommy laughs, a small one, but Wilbur seems to think it counts for everything because his face lights up.

“It’s not your fault,” Wilbur says.

The omelette has been well and truly burnt by now.

Tommy just looks at him.

“A lot of things aren’t your fault,” Wilbur mutters. “Okay? You’re just one person, you aren’t in control of other people’s actions. You can influence them but at the end of the day your actions are your actions. Their actions are theirs.”

Tommy nods, he stays quiet.

“Toms—” Wilbur hesitates for a second. “Are you safe?”

Where? Tommy wants to ask.

Where— at work he’s not, at home he used to be he’s not sure anymore. He’s not safe when he walks around, he’s not safe in Reddings despite what they’ve tried to tell him. Fuck, he’s not sure if he’s even safe with Wilbur, he’s not sure if that safety is gone if he finds out he’s Theseus. And with a certain sort of horror Tommy realises that it doesn’t matter where, because everywhere he goes he’s never truly safe.

He’s not safe.

Not really— there’s the obvious safety. He’s with heroes, who all care about him— to a degree but he’s not safe. Logstedchire isn’t safe— his apartment... it’s not really safe anymore. But... if work or here or anyone who matters to Tommy finds out he’s Theseus then that’s gone. Just like that. It’s not really safe, it’s the type of safety that’s thin, the one that might as well not be real. The type of safety he felt when he lived with his parents, he was safe from anything outside the walls of Archer’s Avenue, but he was never safe from the dangers within.

“—mmy, Tommy?” Wilbur says. He’s standing directly in front of Tommy, not touching him but his arm is raised like he was going to put it on Tommy’s shoulder. He looks at Tommy

with more concern. “What’s happenin’ bud?”

“I’m not safe,” the words tumble out of Tommy’s mouth. “No matter where I go or what I do I’m not safe. It’s not safe for me here— it’s not safe for me anyway. I gotta—” he stumbles backwards. “I gotta go.”

The tower isn’t safe, the tower has blue there. Blue that might still be being used to experiment on kids— blue that ruined his life and left him to pick up the pieces. It’s not safe there. If Wilbur or Phil or Dream or anyone found out he’s Theseus then it’s not safe, and he can’t be safe— he’s not safe.

Home isn’t safe— Tubbo’s there, and Tubbo doesn’t mean to be unsafe but he is. He’s hurting Tommy— maybe without realising it or maybe he realises exactly what he’s doing. But it’s not safe. It used to be but it’s not.

Here isn’t safe they could find out, or someone could attack Phil’s house or him or Elysium could come after Wilbur again— oh Primes they could go after Fundy or Wilbur or Dream or —

He can’t breathe— he can’t breathe.

It’s not safe, he wants to be safe.

“It’s not—” Tommy stumbles out, “Nowhere. It’s not— I’m not— help.”

At some point he’s been seated on the kitchen floor, Wilbur is kneeling in front of him, he’s blurry, maybe from the tears or Tommy just needs to focus his eyes. But he’s there, and it’s not safe and—

“Elysium,” Tommy spits out, “They’re gonna... I dunno but they’re gonna— and I can’t lose — I can’t lose you Wilbur.”

“Hey, hey, hey,” Wilbur says, “I’m here. I’m here, and I’m okay. Okay? Nothing’s gonna happen to me.”

“They’re gonna—” Tommy grabs Wilbur’s arm, “They’re gonna hurt you, I know they’re— I know that they’re gonna— they’re— they, they want you dead and I—” Tommy lets out a noise. “I’m being dumb, I’m being dumb— I’m sorry, I’m being dumb—”

Wilbur shakes his head, “I’m okay. I’m here. Nothing is going to happen to me, I won’t let anything happen to me— or you, or anyone in this house. Or your friends, okay? We’re all gonna be alright. None of us will let other people get hurt.”

“They— Hector— they called you Hector,” Tommy chokes out, “Do you know what they do to Hector? In the Iliad— they—” Tommy lets out a sob and claps his hand over his mouth. He’s being too loud, he’s being too loud he’s going to wake someone up.

He needs to shut up, he needs to shut the fuck up—

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry— I’m sorry, I—”

“You’re okay,” Wilbur says and Tommy needs the strength in his voice. “Tommy, you’re in a house with the most skilled individuals in the country, okay? You’re sitting on the kitchen floor— and I’m speaking to you. You’re not in trouble, never— not for this. You’re okay, alright? You’re here.”

“You’re all gonna—” Tommy still can’t breathe— he can’t breathe please he just wants to breathe. “Hate— hate me. I don’t want you to hate me, Wilbur! Please don’t hate me— please.”

“I won’t, I won’t, I won’t,” Wilbur says gently, “Tommy there’s nothing you could really do that would make me hate you. Okay?”

“Hurt your family, your friends,” Tommy spits out.

He still can't breathe he needs to be able to breathe—

“Tommy, you need to breathe,” Wilbur says, “Okay? You're safe here—”

“I'm not!”

“You're safe here, you're alright— okay? You're alright. You just need to focus on breathing, kid, then we'll get you home.”

“I don't wanna go home,” Tommy shakes his head, “He's still mad at me I don't know why—I don't want him to be mad at me—I'm so tired of him being mad at me.”

“You're okay, you're alright. I know buddy, I know,” Wilbur says so gently— so full of care. “This isn't your fault, okay?”

“So—” Tommy makes a choking noise. “So many things are my fault, I keep hurting the people I love—I keep—I keep hurting them and I don't wanna hurt them.”

Wilbur looks like his heart is breaking in his chest.

“I'm sorry,” Tommy chokes out, “I keep hurting and ruining and I'm not a good friend or a good anything and I'm being too loud and I'm sorry—”

Tommy's not safe. He's not safe, not in any way that matters. He's lying to everyone.

If Wilbur found out—

A sob tears itself from his mouth.

It doesn't matter, none of it matters— the park visits, the KFC, the side-eyes and knowing looks and the stomach splitting laughter and tears in their eyes from laughing and the hugs and the smiles. It doesn't matter— it's all fake and it's all built on lie that Tommy made— and none of it matters and he's not safe here and he wants to be safe but he can't.

None of it matters, none of it matters— it's all gone the moment he finds out.

He's built one of his most important relationships on lies. And now he's crying because he kept those lies going and none of it matters.

"I'm sorry," Tommy says, "I— I'm so sorry Wil, I'm sorry please— please don't— I'm sorry, I'm sorry please don't leave me."

"I'm not leaving," Wilbur's voice is still *so gentle* and that gentleness is going to leave one day and he can't. "Okay, Toms? I'm not leaving you. I'm here."

"Might as well leave now," Tommy manages a laugh and it's bitter and twisted.

Then he takes another look at Wilbur's face and he doesn't want him to leave—

"Don't leave," Tommy says, "Don't— please I didn't mean it, I don't mean it. Please stay— please."

There's gentle footsteps and Tommy looks up.

It's Techno.

And that's what manages to get him to break because Techno gets it at least— he gets it.

"Tech," Tommy chokes out, "He's— he's gonna—"

Techno rushes over, before crouching on the ground next to Wilbur. He glances at Wilbur. Then back at Tommy.

"Wil," Techno says slowly. "I don't think you can fix this, I think you need to leave."

He doesn't want Wilbur to leave, Wilbur right now is proof that at least a bit of it isn't a lie. It's proof that he wants to be here, and if Wilbur leaves then Tommy will beat himself up over it forever.

"No—" he rasps.

"Toms," Techno says, "He will be back I promise, okay? You have my word."

Tears are rolling down his face now, and he can't stop the tears no matter how much he wants to. "Wil's gonna— he's—" and he just... keeps crying.

Techno kneels down next to him, looking between Wilbur and Tommy and his eyes soften when they land on Tommy. "What happened?" It's directed at Wilbur, Tommy knows this because he can't manage anything through the tears and sobs.

Wilbur hesitates for a moment, "I— he thinks I hate him?"

Tommy cries a little bit harder, trying to press a hand over his mouth to shut himself up. It's not overly effective and makes it harder to breathe, but he's just a little bit quieter and Tommy counts that as a win.

“Oh,” Techno says, and like that he gets it. “Wil— I’m gonna need you to leave.”

“But—”

Tommy doesn’t want Wilbur to leave— then that means he loses something that proves that Wilbur doesn’t hate him. It means he loses Wilbur’s care, as confusing as it is, it means he has no proof that Wilbur *wants* to be here.

“I know you trust me,” Techno says, “And I need you to trust me with this.”

Wilbur hesitates for a few moments, before he gets to his feet and takes a few steps backwards. He almost trips over his own feet, before turning around and almost running out of the room.

Tommy looks at Techno, and at the empty space that Wilbur used to fill up.

Then he starts crying all over again. Tears roll down his face and he can’t stop himself from crying and he wants to stop himself from crying because this is so fucking stupid and he’s being too loud and—

Techno gently grabs Tommy’s wrist, the one that is connected to the hand pressed against his mouth.

For someone with super strength, Techno has always been incredibly gentle. He grabs Tommy’s wrist and pries it away from his mouth. He holds it there for a second and Tommy doesn’t try to move it back.

“You’re allowed to be upset,” Techno whispers, “Okay? That’s what makes you human, you don’t need to hide that. Not from us, not from anyone.”

“Don’t wanna— bother— anyone.” Tommy manages between hiccupping sobs.

“You’re not,” Techno says and he sounds as sure as ever. “Even if you are, we don’t mind. We don’t mind if you bother us, because we care about you and we want you to be safe and we want to make sure you’re okay.”

Tommy nods through his tears that are still falling.

“Wil’s—”

And that makes Tommy burst into tears all over again.

He thought he had some control over his tears but this time proves differently and Tommy just starts crying even harder.

“I—” Tommy stops himself, “Hug?”

Techno opens his arms and Tommy basically launches himself into them.

He gives the best hugs.

And Tommy cries even harder because holy fuck it’s been so long since he’s been hugged. And Techno’s warm and lets him cry into his shoulder and he’s really just the best and Tommy’s not sure if he deserves this.

“I don’t—” Tommy manages through tears, it’s slightly muffled by Techno’s hoodie. “Wanna lose him.”

“You won’t,” Techno promises, “Elysium won’t hurt him, he won’t hate you.”

“You’re lying!” Tommy lets go and sits back against the cabinets, “You’re lying I know he will and everyone says he won’t and you can’t promise that and I know he’s going to hate me and I wished someone just told me that!”

“I’m not gonna tell you that,” Techno grabs Tommy’s wrists, and he didn’t even realise that he’s reached up to his hair. “Because that would be a lie, Wilbur will never hate you. Wilbur doesn’t hate— not easily, he will not hate you. He may not like you, but he will never, ever hate you. He might say he does, he’s lying.”

“He— he said we’re like brothers,” Tommy spits out. “And— it’s all a lie. He doesn’t know me, he can’t know me because I’m a liar! He thinks that and it’s not because that’s not how that works. And I said I thought the same and I don’t know if I meant it or if I wanted to mean it or—”

Techno shakes his head, “No don’t let yourself think that. You’re keeping a secret to keep yourself safe. That doesn’t mean he’s not your friend— or your brother or whatever you want him to be. You two sat on the roof right?”

Tommy nods his head.

“Yeah—” Techno smiles, “Wil told me about that, he cried when you said you were like his brother. That’s not fake— that’s not built on lies. That’s just because you care about him, and he cares about you— and it can be that simple, or that complicated.”

Tommy takes a deep breath, trying to steady himself. His hands are shaking and tears are still rolling, but he isn’t sobbing anymore. He’s managed to calm himself down a little, or Techno did, which is probably more accurate, and his breathing has evened out. Even just a little bit, but it’s steadier, he’s sure of it.

And for a moment he lets himself pause.

It’s not something he does very often— or lets himself do. He’s so used to always moving, always running that pausing and processing is hard.

Not everything in his life has to be this complex, not everything has to be a big thing. Wilbur cares about Tommy, and Tommy cares about Wilbur. They're both hiding things— Tommy's hiding a fucking lot of things, but... not everything needs to be this complicated.

Sometimes it can be two brothers sitting on a roof watching a sunset.

They care about each other, and at the end of the day— Tommy thinks that's all that matters. Of course there are hiccups and secrets and lying and so many other things he's not even letting himself think about right now.

But they care, and that's what matters most.

Huh.

Tommy's crying still— and he probably shouldn't still be crying but he is. And he probably shouldn't be clinging onto Techno but he is, and he shouldn't feel as unwell as he does but he can't do anything about it.

“I—” Tommy says through tears, “He— I don't wanna lose him, he means so much to me, and I hate that he means so much to me because I didn't— I didn't ask for this. I didn't ask to be Theseus, I didn't ask to have powers, I don't want them anymore. They hurt more than they do good and I just want it all to stop and it's all too much!”

The funny thing about Wilbur and Techno, is that they have the same expression when it looks like their heart has been basically ripped from their chests. It's probably learnt— but it's still something Tommy notices.

Because right now Techno looks at a loss of what to do.

“I dunno how to fix this kid,” Techno manages, and it sounds like he’s going to cry as well. “I — you’re gaining control over your powers. That’s amazing. I know you didn’t ask for these powers, no one does and I know you didn’t ask for all of this,” he gestures around them and Tommy knows what he means. “I know, kid. You never ask for anything and you’re expected to give everything.”

Tommy nods, his lip quivering and he can’t burst into tears again— he can’t just cry whenever someone really sees him. When someone looks through whatever mask he needs for the day and just sees him.

He feels so seen.

“Fuck,” Techno says and wipes at his own eyes. “I know,” is what he says, “And I’m so sorry I don’t know how to fix this. I don’t know how to fix what’s happening with Tubbo—”

“Nothing’s happening with Tubbo—” Tommy says before he can stop himself, and he’s not quite sure why he says it.

Techno’s face softens a little, “Okay,” he says softly, and they all know he doesn’t believe him and for some reason he doesn’t push. “I don’t believe you, and I know you know that.”

“Please—” Tommy says, “Not— not today, don’t push today.”

“I won’t,” Techno says softly, “I’m not sure how to fix all of these things happening in your life. I’ll never really be sure. But I think you need to know that I am here for you, okay? I think you need to know that, I think you need to hear that and I think you keep forgetting.”

“I can’t— I can’t do this,” Tommy says.

“Huh?” Techno still sounds like he’s going to cry.

“I dunno!” Tommy yells, “All of it? The constant... next thing I have to worry about, checking over my shoulder every three seconds. All of it— I can’t— it doesn’t benefit anyone. No one—”

“Theseus?” Techno asks.

Tommy nods.

“Tommy—” Techno says, “Fuck. You can’t see how much you’ve done, for so many. And you might not ever see that, but you have changed lives. Heroes are fuckin’ useless, and you’re amazing— every kid in Logstedchire looks up to you, because you’re brave—”

“I’m not.”

“You are,” Techno’s voice doesn’t waiver, it never does with him. “You are— some people say bravery is just a lack of self preservation skills.”

“Who says that?”

“Me,” Techno says with a small laugh. “Tommy—” Techno sighs, “Okay. Do you want to know the truth?”

Probably not— but Tommy nods his head anyway.

“Wilbur was miserable,” Techno confesses, “He was— it wasn’t good. And then you show up, and— you’re just you and Wilbur’s laughing the hardest I’ve heard in years. And he’s smiling the largest he has in years and— I think a lot of that was you. I think a lot of that was just you being you. I think—” he pauses for a moment and looks at Tommy. “I think that you are one of the most incredible people I’ve ever gotten to meet. You’re a bit fucked, you have your flaws and boy are they apparent. But you’re just... you, you make your decisions, you stick with them. You protect people who don’t have a voice and you protect yourself and the people who matter.”

Tommy just looks at Techno.

“And if you wanna quit being Theseus,” Techno continues, “That’s okay. You’re young, you’ve done so much for so many and even anyone who barely knows you can see how the pressure is building on you. You’re not as happy, and that’s okay, you’re allowed to quit. You don’t need to be a hero all the time.”

Tommy shakes his head, “I do— someone— I don’t know how to not.”

“Funny,” Techno doesn’t sound like any part of that is funny. “Wilbur told me the same six months ago.”

“I—” Tommy runs his hands down his face. “I don’t know. I don’t know what I want— or who I want to be or what I am. Somewhere between— what you say when you’re being nice to me and what my parents said I was, I am and the two images are so different one of them has to be wrong. And— I’m not a good person.”

“No,” Techno says, “You’re not.”

“Ouch okay—”

“No one is,” Techno moves so he’s sitting next to Tommy instead of in front of him, his legs stretched out in front of him. “No one’s a good person, a good person is a contradiction because people are just that— people. They’re not evil, they’re not good, they’re just... there. And yes people are kind, but that doesn’t make them good.”

Tommy crosses his arms and falls silent.

“For what it’s worth,” Techno looks at the wall. “I’m so glad I met you.”

“Why?” Tommy whispers, “I haven’t done anything that—”

“You make me happy,” Techno says, “And stressed and worried and upset. But you make me happy, you make Wilbur happy. We worry about you because we care about you. You’re funny and I’ve never met anyone like you, and I never will meet anyone like you again. And I don’t think you need to do more than that, you don’t need to save me from a burning building or save Floof from... I dunno eating a stick. Those big actions— like yeah they mean something, but so do the little actions.”

Tommy doesn’t say anything.

“Noticing my leg was fucked up,” Techno says, “Or... holding Floof when he’s being a menace. Or the fact I one hundred percent know the gift you got me for Swinter was not on sale— or the times you throw a blanket over me when I fall asleep or—” he lets himself trail off. “You don’t need to prove your worth with the big moments, not with me.”

Tommy nods and stares at the counter. “What if Wil does find out?”

Techno inhales sharply, “Then he finds out,” Techno says, “And we’ll deal with that.”

“When did it become ‘we’ instead of ‘you’?” Tommy asks.

Techno shrugs, “Dunno, but I’m glad it did.”

“I’m so mad you calmed me down.”

“You can stay mad.”

“I hate you.”

“Sure ya do.”

“You’re literally my least favourite person.”

“I don’t think I am.”

“Mhmm. You are,” Tommy nods his head to really drive home his point.

Techno manages a smile. “We’ll figure this out.”

“Always do,” Tommy mutters.

“Just— don’t like... commit any major crimes and we should be fine.”

Tommy sighs, “That might be harder than you think, bossman.”

Techno rolls his eyes, “Okay, Tommy.”

They settle in the silence, Tommy sighs before leaning against Techno’s arm a little more. He doesn’t say anything and lets Tommy sit there.

Tommy doesn’t really like the silence so he opens his mouth again. Then he closes it, and he opens it again. “I’m tired.”

“Panic attack will do that to you,” Techno deadpans.

“Okay smartass.”

Techno shrugs.

“Should we tell Wil that I’m okay?”

“Nah,” Techno screws up his nose. “I think what I’m actually going to do is tell him that a unicorn flew in through the window and stole you. And now we’re going to go find you, but we need to find a narwhal.”

“Ah yes— the mythical animal a narwhal.” Tommy deadpans.

Techno looks at him. “Narwhals are real?”

Tommy pauses for a moment, “Tech—”

“They’re... they’re not, right? They’re like— I dunno, unicorns and— werewolves.”

“Techno. Narwhals are real.”

“They are not!” Techno says, “I’m going to Wilbur right now.” He gets up off the ground with great difficulty, he half uses the counter to get up.

Then he walks outside to where Wilbur looks like he’s sulking on the hammock. Just swaying back and forth while glaring at the sky like it personally wronged him.

On closer inspection Tommy can see he has his phone to his ear, he glances at Tommy and Techno. “Thanks Daniel—” and hangs up.

Now. Why was Wilbur Soot talking to Purpled— well mostly likely Purpled. It's not like Daniel is exactly an uncommon name, but it's a little bit sus, just a tiny very very small bit. Tommy goes to open his mouth.

Instead Techno swings the hammock over so Wilbur falls on the floor.

He yells.

“Wilbur!” Techno yells, “Are narwhals real?”

“Huh—” Wilbur says, still on the floor and looking up at Techno. “What— what do you mean are narwhals real?”

“Are narwhals real?” Techno repeats, and this has a sort of urgency that Tommy has honestly never heard in his voice.

He starts recording.

“Are— narwhals real?” Wilbur repeats, “Of course they're real.”

“They have a fuckin' sword as a forehead!” Techno yells, “They're like a pokemon!”

Wilbur just stares at him. “Tech, I have no clue if you're kidding or not.”

“He's not,” Tommy adds.

“I'm not,” Techno says, “They're not real, right? Narwhals are like a unicorn.”

“Uh— except that narwhals are real and unicorns aren’t.”

“Have you ever seen a narwhal?” Techno says, “How do we know that all the photos aren’t just a practical joke played on us?”

“I— yes I’ve seen a narwhal, I saw one while in Russia.”

“Why were you in Russia?” Techno yells, “Why did you see a narwhal and are you sure you saw one?”

“Searching for identification, because I was in a helicopter flying over the ocean and yes I’m sure I saw one. They’re bigger than you think.”

Techno crosses his arms. “They’re not real.”

“Tech—”

“They’re not! I’ve decided!” Techno says.

Tommy... cackles as he stops the video.

“I— surely they’re not real, Wilbur are you sure they’re real?”

“I am certain narwhals are real.”

“But are you sure—”

“Yes I’m sure.” Wilbur says.

“But are you—”

“Yes.”

“But—”

“Techno.”

“Yeah?”

“Shut the fuck up.”

“Okay,” Techno mumbles and crosses his arms. “I’m finding Floof, he’s nicer to me than all of you.”

Wilbur and Tommy watch as Techno leaves, and Wilbur decides now is the time to get off the ground and he sighs as Techno closes the window behind him. “Was that a bit or not.”

“I don’t think so,” Tommy says slowly, “He seems actually devastated that narwhals are real animals.”

Wilbur has a fond smile on his face, it’s not quite the same as the one that he gives Tommy. But it’s similar enough that Tommy can’t stop himself from smiling as well. Tommy tries to suppress his smile but to no avail.

“Little brothers y’know,” Wilbur says before ruffling Tommy’s hair. Tommy yells before swatting away his hands.

“Older brothers,” Tommy tries to say it with any sort of malice but he can’t manage it, he’s smiling too large. “Fuckin’ rufflin’ my hair and shit.”

Wilbur grins.

And yeah... sometimes it is as simple as that. Three brothers wondering whether narwhals are real or not.

Brothers—

Wilbur walks off, grinning and with a look in his eyes that means he’s going to bother Techno about the whole narwhal thing.

Tommy follows after him... slowly. His feet against the grass as his smile widens as he hears Wilbur and Techno yelling at each other through the opened door. And he hears the noise of what appears to be Techno pelting various objects at Wilbur.

Yeah.

Brothers.

“Tommy!” Wilbur screams. “Techno’s hurting me!”

“You’re being a little bitch!” Techno yells back.

Tommy grins to himself, a private thing that no one else will ever see. Something that no one else will ever have to see.

“Oh, it’s on!” Tommy yells, and runs inside.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter Summary:

- Literally nothing happened
- They had BBQ
- Fluff happened
- Crimeboys fluff happened and now Tommy sees Wilbur like a brother!
- Wilbur asked about the home situation with Tubbo
- Tommy had a breakdown
- Techno was the bestest big brother
- The end.

Guys u've made so much art since last chapter please it's been like 2 weeks.

Rozy (GO FOLLOW THEM) drew so much art including; [tina!wilbur](#), [tina!tommy lookin'](#) badass, and then [tina!wilbur but attractive](#)

[PHANTOM](#) (the beloved) drew so many things /pos, but i would like to highlight [this comic](#), [tina!niki](#) and [tina!wilbur being attractive AGAIN](#)

DRAGONDIVE DREW THIS [AWESOME AF SHOT OF THE INTERVIEW](#)

Hazelbread drew [OTTO AND TOMMY'S ARMY](#)

and toe drew [OTTO TOOOO](#)

percy has drawn so many cool images! like [THIS ONE](#) AND [THIS ONE](#) and [ALSO THIS ONE](#)

VAL DREW [TINA!TOMMY LOOKIN' COOL](#)

MARMS DREW [TINA!BAD LOOKING SO FUCKIN BADASS](#)

and [tina!wilbur](#) drawn by melon like damn

MYSTICLEMON DREW [TINA!NIKI](#) LOOK AT HER

mura murastar drew [tinaaos!wilbur finally putting a shirt on](#) after a long campaign

ugh. todo. they exist, they started the simp train with [this](#)

then it spiralled and [this happened](#) from lilmango

it's so early i should be sleeping rn

also tay only artist ever [drew tina!goldenboys](#) so look at them

some sicc [siren & spectre crossover](#).

okay that's all i can do i will /gen pass out

tysm for all the art. next chapter out... maybe... mid next month? it's like 30% done

as always tysm for the love, i appreciate u all you have changed my life /gen

In Which Tommy Does Not Make a Single Good Decision

Chapter Summary

Tommy's eyes shoot open and he looks up at Spectre.

“Let's find out who you are, you fucker—”

Spectre reaches for his mask.

or, crimeboys enjoyers no longer stay winning, bedrockbros enjoyers get an argument, and as always the tinaaos!clingyduo enjoyers are in FUCKING SHAMBLES. Also Fundy literally can not win like ever. Neither can Tommy, but he's fine tho... trust me

also to that one person who said the update would be out mid-late august... no. fuck you. it's early august because it's not the 15th yet, yes i know it doesn't make sense but shut up

Chapter Notes

THANK YOU SO, SO MUCH TO TWI AND FIG FOR BOTH BETA-ING THIS CHAPTER ON SUCH SHORT NOTICE

(any typos that have been left in are intentional btw)

This was supposed to be like 10k words... it's like 22k... I... I genuinely have NO CLUE how this happened

Warnings: guns, violence, fire, vomiting, panic attack(s)
Aka. tommy spirals a bit in this chapter:

PANIC ATTACKS:

Starts from:

With a few final steps, Tommy steps into the building— he closes the door behind him and locks it behind him. Purpled, Tubbo and Ranboo all have keys, anyone else doesn't matter at the moment.

Ends at:

“Are you hurt?” Techno presses.

Summary is at the end as always! If I've forgotten something in the warnings please let me know and I will add it as soon as I can! Take care, make good choices, and please don't use people as human shields (you'll get this after you read the chapter).

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“No.”

“Please.”

“No.”

“Pretty, pretty, pretty please, I’ll give you like twenty bucks,” Tommy says, following Purpled around as he tries to get all the dishes near the sink. “Please— I can’t go on patrol I have this thing— I have to organise this event for Phil and get in contact with Buzzfeed to do that puppy interview and I literally do not have the time—”

Purpled turns around and shoots a smile over his shoulder. “Don’t care, didn’t ask—”

“I fuckin’ hate you,” Tommy announces and Ranboo looks up from his homework.

Tubbo is...

Well that’s a great question where the fuck *is* Tubbo?

“Where’s Tubbo?” Tommy says and Ranboo looks back down at his homework. “I literally don’t care, as long as he’s not in a fuckin’ ditch or whatever—”

“Schlatt’s,” Ranboo says slowly.

“And you’re not with him?” Purpled says.

That gets a harsh look from Tommy and a sad look from Ranboo.

“Oops,” Purpled grins, “Guess I just said that one out loud, fuckin’ pity—”

“Purpled I will—”

Purpled gives a wide smile, “Anyway I got a game night with Quackity.”

“Huh?” Tommy says, “Since when was that a thing?”

Purpled waves his phone in Tommy’s face in a way that is supposed to probably be helpful but it’s just simply not. “Uh since about seven in the morning today.”

Tommy looks at Ranboo, who closes his book and looks at Tommy. “What?”

“You’ll also magically have a reason to fuck off.”

“Yeah...” Ranboo says slowly, and Tommy thinks whatever next comes out of his mouth is just a blatant lie. “Gonna hang out with some friends.”

Tommy just gives him a look, “If you’re going to hang out with Tubbo I don’t care.”

“I’m not,” Ranboo mutters, yet he refuses to make eye contact.

Tommy just looks at him for a long moment, squinting slightly, before eventually shaking his head and looking away. It doesn't matter, if Ranboo wants to be a shifty bitch then he can be a shifty bitch—

“Wait,” Tommy says, “Who’s gonna be like... making sure I don’t die?”

Purpled and Ranboo glance at each other from a moment, and both of them flinch from eye contact.

“Uh—” Purpled says slowly. “I think I did it last time.”

“My thing is way more important,” Ranboo stands up, starting to pack away his homework. “Surely you can reschedule a game night?”

“Surely you can reschedule your plotting with Tubbo.”

“I’m not plotting with Tubbo—”

“Fuckin’ seems like it,” Purpled snaps, he goes to open his mouth again.

“Fuck’s sake,” Tommy says and both of them turn to look at him. Both parties look offended about this. “I’ll connect an earpiece to the radio station.”

“That can be tracked—”

“I’ll destroy it before I get home,” Tommy says, “We have the frequencies for the hero hotline and the police— while it would be better to have someone if you’re both busy I can handle it.”

“If you ever say that you can handle it,” Purpled argues, “You can not handle it.”

“Then reschedule,” Ranboo snaps.

“Why do you have a backbone all of a sudden?” Purpled snaps, “Oh no, Tubbo’s being an abusive piece of shit— now’s the time to defend him.”

Tommy’s going to throw himself off a roof.

“You have no idea what—”

“He’s going through,” Purpled mocks in a high-pitched voice that does not sound like Ranboo even slightly. “Yeah, yeah, but I do understand that I want to knock him in the nose.”

Tommy is actually going to throw himself off a roof, he can probably ask Wilbur to do it as well. Wilbur’s just kind like that—

“He’s going through a rough time—”

“Yeah because he’s the only one here who has ever gone through anything difficult.”

“That’s not what I’m saying—”

“Then what *are* you saying Ranboo? I’m getting mixed signals here.”

Maybe even Techno would take mercy on him.

Phil would, he might drop him from a roof if Tommy annoyed him into doing it, he was nice like that as well...

“I’m saying,” Ranboo says, “That he needs time.”

Purpled looks at Ranboo.

He looks like he’s about to climb over the table and start strangling him with his bare hands and Tommy would laugh if it wasn’t Ranboo on the other side of the table looking like he was about to strangle Purpled right back.

“It’s too early for this,” Tommy mutters, running a hand through his hair. “Ranboo go hang out with your alleged friends, Purpled go hang out with yours. I’ll be fine, I’ll be super careful— Ranboo stop trying to argue. I swear to Prime and also Ender. Purpled if you say another word I am going to attack you.”

“Another word—”

Tommy throws a drink bottle at Purpled, it’s plastic— not even metal, and bounces straight off of his head and bounces across the floor.

Purpled glares and looks at Ranboo. “He’s being a prick.”

“And so are you.”

“I’m looking out for you! Why am I the only person in the house who seems to actually care about your health and wellbeing?”

“Purpled.”

“Thomas.”

“Get out.”

Purpled opens his mouth then sighs, “Yeah— okay fair,” he grabs a set of keys off the keyholder and glances at his phone. “You’re lucky I like you.”

Tommy’s not sure if lucky is the word he’d use.

Then Purpled leaves.

Ranboo looks at him, “You enable him.”

Tommy is going to genuinely throw himself off a roof and damage his ribs because Ranboo was way nicer to him when that whole thing was happening.

“Okay,” Tommy sighs.

“Tubbo’s your best friend, right?” Ranboo says.

“No,” Tommy replies, and that throws Ranboo for a loop. “I prefer it when my best friends actually talk to me, and actually care about my health and wellbeing. And somehow I’m only living with one person who does that— and it is not me.”

“I care about you.”

“Real fuckin’ funny way of showin’ it,” Tommy retorts.

And Ranboo is left standing in the kitchen as Tommy goes to the bedroom.

Theseus-ing up is always easy, Tommy doesn't really have to think about it anymore. Put on a black t-shirt then the hoodie with the red accents, but it's still mostly black because he's an emo like that. Cargo pants because he likes how they have the red trimming and accents. Socks, boots. Put on the fingerless gloves, hood up, pin the hood, put the mask and goggles on.

Open the window.

He's not sure when the actions became automatic but they did, and he's grateful for that.

Connecting the ear piece is actually the simple bit, it's something that Tubbo made a heap of a while ago. They're supposed to go from... well here to wherever Tommy is with a frequency that most radios don't go to, but Tommy thinks he knows how to change the frequency.

Somewhere in his room they have the frequencies needed written down, he looks under the bed and eventually finds the notebook he needs.

Tubbo's chicken scratch of writing meets him, it's from a couple of months ago... when everything was more difficult but it was simple, it fit in the nice narrative they had been able to create for themselves. Life was hard, money was tight and Tommy had Tubbo and Ranboo by his side—

He tears his eyes away from the scribbles on the pages and flicks through the book.

Sure enough he finds the right frequencies and with what is frankly quite a bit of effort he manages to change the earpiece to the frequency he needs. The one of the hero hotline, which is mostly quiet, especially when it comes to Logstedchire.

He grabs another one, it's probably not a great idea to have what is essentially two earphones in while he's on patrol but one of them will be quiet the entire time and it's a just in case.

So he changes the other one.

Now he has airpods—

But instead of listening to tunes he's... listening to people report things to the police or also heroes.

Be a vigilante, they said, it'll be fun, they said—

Where's the fun? He gets to listen to... fucking police radio systems and people being like *'something funny moved in my backyard I need ten heroes to save me'*. No one ever mentioned how boring being a vigilante is—

Sure the near death experiences make it less boring but—

Tommy clambers out the window before throwing himself across one of the gaps, he soars for a moment before grabbing onto the edge of the roof and hauling himself up onto the stop.

Yeah! He got this.

For the first bit Tommy doesn't do a lot, he finds a muesli bar and eats that because he's a little tiny, tiny bit unstable and he's aware this is bad for his health but he's also aware of the fact he does not give a single shit at all.

Kinda iconic of him not gonna lie—

The radio waves are incredibly boring, like Tommy would like to fall asleep right here and now because how does Logstedchire not have any crime going off tonight? Why do all the muggers rest when he doesn't.

It's the fucking updates account—

There's a crackle in his ear.

"There's a report of Elysium members breaking into the hero tower—"

Fucking *what* ?

He stands up, already eyeing the tower in the distance.

Okay he can not get there quickly at all—

If he can find out where Elysium are trying to get— maybe Reddings, then he can cut them off. Oh, that will look good for him, if the heroes are after him.

"They're heading South, we're not sure where they'll stop."

Okay... they're trying to get to Reddings for sure.

Tommy breaks out into a run before throwing himself over a gap. He lands well and keeps running, the wind is in his hair— it's just a windy night apparently and his hood keeps on trying to be pushed back by the wind but it's pinned in place.

He manages a smile under his mask as he jumps from building to building.

It's nice to know that, despite everything he still has this. Jumping from building to building isn't as calming as it used to be. Tommy's afraid he'll fall and not be able to stop himself. But

— it's nice.

Not as nice as it used to be, but it's nice.

He lands on another building and his knees creak in a way that does not seem healthy.

For a moment he stays there breathing heavily, just trying to focus on not passing out from the effort. Tommy wheezes and holds onto the side of the building.

“I hate—” Tommy wheezes, mostly to himself, “Running.”

Then he stands back up and keeps running again.

Tommy keeps running, for a while, he's still tired and can barely breathe but there's something welcoming about this. He likes running and he likes using his powers but he does not particularly enjoy being unable to breathe.

After a few blocks Tommy stops again, wheezing for breath.

He has no clue where he is. The heroes tower is in the distance and Tommy just... keeps wheezing for a moment.

There's a noise next to him, and Tommy looks up and his face screws up.

It's a black van of some kind— Tommy doesn't really know where he is— he thinks he might be in Kinoko— maybe on the edge of Kinoko. What's on the edge of Kinoko? There's a library.

“Get out, get out, get out,” he hears someone yell and he looks over to his right still struggling to breathe. He knows that voice— that’s— Hannah’s voice? The relatively nice person who threatened to kill him.

Tommy watches, unable to do much apart from wheeze on the roof.

Several people get out of the van.

Most of them are wearing some sort of bullet-proof vest and the gas masks that Tommy is becoming annoyingly familiar with— why can he not escape these things no matter where he goes?

These ones only cover the nose and mouth however, some of them are wearing hoods to hide their face. Some of them aren’t and Tommy can see Hannah in particular with two neat braids so her hair is out of her face.

Four of them are wearing purple sleeves, and that seems significant—

“Training mission my ass!” Hannah yells, “Everyone onto the lawn. We’re waiting for extraction—”

“Do we have time to wait for extraction?” Someone else yells and— that’s Nestor. The person from the warehouse, the person who was there when Tommy did a huge flashbang and knocked out the power and—

The person who knows his identity— and that he betrayed Techno—

And Tommy finds that breathing is now difficult for two reasons.

... Techno did say he was the main character—

Is this main character luck?

Tommy stays on the roof for a bit, just watching.

Then he gains his energy and jumps down.

Several people look up at him.

Then Nestor points a gun at him, there's little hesitation behind his actions and he's careful as he slowly moves so he's standing in front of the four people with the purple sleeves— either those four are important or young.

Tommy's not sure what answer he likes less.

“We don't want trouble—” Nestor says slowly, gun still pointed at Tommy's face. Tommy knows he can stop the bullet from firing, he's in no danger. “Okay... we just want to leave, that's all there is to this.”

Hannah now has a gun... one that looks a lot more significant than the one that Nestor is holding at him— and Tommy has the feeling that he's about to get his head blown off.

There's a look in Hannah's eyes... Tommy hasn't seen it before, not directed at him, he's never been on the other side of it. It's... determination, that's all there is to it, she's determined and she's confident and—

“The kids with the purple sleeves are— well they're kids,” Hannah says carefully, “Rumour has it you're a kid too, but if you even slightly think about hurting these kids— the ones under my protection, I will not hesitate to kill you.”

Tommy just stares at her.

“Alright?” Hannah says, “We don’t want trouble and I don’t think you do either. So I need you to step away... slowly and carefully. Alright? You leave us alone and we leave you alone — you are of no threat to Elysium.”

“Now that’s just a lie,” someone says, one of the people with the purple sleeves and they get a sharp look from Hannah which makes them quiet.

Tommy looks over the situation, there’s the four kids, there’s the two adults, Hannah and Nestor and then there’s about eight other Elysium members. There are six guns pointed at him and Tommy will win this fight.

He really would like to get in the heroes good books—

So he steps forwards, palms raised and he’s ready to fight the world and then maybe a few more people after that.

“Theseus,” Hannah says. “This is not a fight you will win, I’m not sure if you have siblings or parents— but if you do then you know how hard people will fight to protect people they care about.”

Tommy’s never really had anyone fight for him— but he understands anyway.

He summons some energy to his hands.

He can do this—

Something lands next to him.

It's a bomb.

What the fuck?

Before Tommy can even stop himself he's thrown the thing up in the air where it explodes. Bits of shrapnel fly down around them and Tommy shields his face despite the goggles and the mask.

For a moment both Elysium and Tommy are silent.

Then he hears sirens and cars rolling up near them.

Tommy is a strong person, it's hard for him to give up and he will fight until his final moment — well— it depends.

But there's something in the back of his mind, maybe an instinct from when Deo still mattered and he would teach him everything Tommy didn't know he needed to know.

So he runs.

He runs towards the Kinoko Library, tearing the locked door open with his powers and he hears Elysium run after them, there seems to be a habit instilled in all of them and Tommy runs.

Okay— okay they're in the front room.

There's a desk to his side, it spans most of the length of the wall and there are two walls behind the desk. There are chairs in the back corner for reading, and a few bookshelves in the middle of the room. There's an odd desk and there's a door at the back of the room which leads into the rest of the library.

Right— okay—

Then there's the crack of bullets, ones that don't hit the glass, but ones that shock them into movement.

“Block the windows and doors!” Nestor yells.

And that's the moment everything breaks out into chaos.

People start running around and Tommy for a moment stands there trying to process what the fuck his life is. Everyone starts running around and they rip the books off of bookshelves. They thump against the floor.

No bullets are firing yet, and that seems like a good sign.

One of the people who have purple sleeves— the ones who seem not much older than himself — is standing at the front of the doorway with some sort of force field which bullets are bouncing off of.

“I can't hold this long!” One of the kids screams.

Bullets start firing and the people with the purple sleeves— the trainees, who can't be much older than him start screaming. Hannah manages to grab two of them close to her and shields them with her body. Nestor grabs the one near the door who was doing the force fields and drags them out of the way, pushing them to the floor.

Tommy throws both his arms up and the bullets start ricocheting away.

They have a door and half a window to block. They've managed to block one of the doors and most of the windows.

Using his other hand, he whirls around, tipping all the books off the bookcase in one smooth movement and they hit the ground with various thumps. He takes a deep breath before summoning his energy.

He manages to scrape the bookshelf across the floor and push it against the door. He pushes it hard enough that there are splinters and the wall seems to give a little underneath the pressure he puts it under.

Okay. Door blocked.

He has half a window to try and block.

Fuck— they've run outta bookshelves to block the doors with and chairs. There aren't anymore desks either.

Bullets aren't firing anymore but Tommy knows they'll try and breach it in that direction. They're only in the front room of the library they can still get attacked from the back.

Behind the long desk the spans the majority of the right wall (if he's facing towards the door.) Are two doors.

There has to be *something* in there. He runs and vaults over the desk before flinging the door on the left open.

Instead what he gets is facing several guns and bullets start firing.

Tommy lets his powers handle that bit, and all the bullets stop in mid-air. He takes a deep breath before looking at all the cops with their guns.

Then he collects the bullets before flinging them back towards them— they're more like sharp rocks than anything but it works because they all yell.

Tommy reaches behind him, he flicks his wrist and then clenches his fist and the door tears off it's hinges and he presses it up against the window he just got shot at through.

Okay that's great but they still haven't blocked the half of the window and they can throw a bomb in that way and that is not something that Tommy overly fancies, in fact that might be on his list of things he *does not* want.

So he runs to the other door, flinging that open and holding a hand up ready to deflect any bullets.

He's pleasantly surprised by the lack of bullets being flung at him.

It's a supply closet, he waves his hand up and the door tears off the hinges and once again he presses it against the gap in the window they didn't manage to cover quite right.

Tommy sighs, breathing heavily.

He walks fully out of the room, still breathing with more force than he normally would.

All of Elysium are looking at him.

Tommy doesn't say anything, that's kinda his whole thing— as he walks out of the supply closet, which thankfully doesn't have any windows.

“Woah,” one of the purple sleeves mutters.

They get slapped in the arm by a friend on their left.

Tommy sighs before looking around at all of them.

“Theseus,” Nestor says and Tommy stops in his tracks. He blinks for a moment and then slowly turns around. They both know that Nestor knows his identity— from the warehouse, they both know that Nestor has held this with him for months.

Hannah stands next to him, and Tommy can’t help but feel nervous looking at both of them standing in front of him and fully capable of kicking his ass. He glances around— there’s thirteen people in the room, including Tommy. He thinks he could take them in a fight if needed.

“We need to talk,” Nestor says.

Oh. Cool. He’s straight up going to die. Nice. Tommy’s hands start shaking and he can’t help but wonder if it’s from his adrenaline crashing or from the fact he’s genuinely fucking terrified.

He nods his head, and Nestor makes a gesture which means ‘follow me’. Tommy does, and Hannah follows after him.

They go to the little office supply room that Tommy just kinda ripped the door off of. That means at least they can’t block him in, not easily at least and that counts for something. If needed he can tear off a chunk of the wall, either to get out, throw it at someone or something else.

He can get out, he’s not trapped.

Hannah’s eyes land on him, “Tommy?” She whispers.

He nods.

“Holy shit,” Hannah says, “Holy fuck— take off the mask.”

Tommy debates it for a moment, whether taking off his mask is even worth it or if it will lead to a lot more trouble for him. Then he realises that he’s already confirmed it for Hannah, Nestor already knows and he doesn’t really have much to lose at the moment.

He shoves both Hannah and Nestor into the doorway, and he moves into the corner directly to the left of the door. So no one can see him.

Both hands go to the mask, which he pulls down to his chin. He then pulls the goggles up to his forehead for a moment and Hannah’s eyes go even wider.

She stares at Tommy like she’s horrified and honestly she might be. “Holy shit,” she says again, in case Tommy didn’t get the point the first time. “Tommy! You work for the heroes.”

“Fuckin’ aware of that,” he grumbles.

“You’re a vigilante!”

“Again, aware of that—” Tommy looks at Nestor before putting the mask up over his mask, and the goggles back over his eyes. He feels... exposed without them. “What do you wanna talk to me for?”

“We need your help,” Nestor glances over his shoulder and out to the people standing in the entrance room. Some of them are kids and Tommy’s heart clenches a little at that. “We need to get out. We’re currently distracted.”

Tommy crosses his arms and just looks at him.

“We need a distraction and you’re— you’re honestly our best and only hope.”

He stares. “Me helping you is a horrible idea. I already have a hero tailing me— his assignment seems to be to specifically capture me, I don’t need to draw more attention to myself.”

Nestor is holding several vials of blue. Just in his hand, and suddenly Tommy can’t breathe, his chest seems to halt and for a moment all he can do is stare at it in his hand. What the fuck
—

“Taken from the hero tower,” Nestor whispers, and the room feels so much colder.

Tommy stares at it, the blue colour with the flecks of almost sparkly bits floating around in it. It’s kind of mesmerising in a way that Tommy keeps forgetting. Watching the liquid move around and float.

His jaw goes slack and he stares at it— it’s so pretty—

Nestor reaches into his pocket and grabs out a piece of paper “Chemical formula... how to make it.”

Tommy’s mouth falls even further open. His eyes shoot wide and he stares at Nestor for a moment. “Henry will have it saved—”

“Deleted from the database several days ago,” Hannah replies easily, “The hero tower won’t have access to it anymore. But we need to ensure Nestor gets out with the blue and the formula— and I’m not havin’ any of my kids gettin’ hurt.”

“Destroy it,” Tommy says breathlessly, looking at the paper. “Burn it.”

“Someone needs to know— know what this drug does and how to create it.”

“They don’t,” Tommy whispers and wishes it sounds like he’s not going to cry. “No one. No one has the right.”

“We’re trying to reverse it.”

Ha. Sam said that.

Holy fuck. Sam said that— did he know, they had the chemical compound and that it was apparently made there? Surely he had to know that— had to know about blue in order to make the power suppressors. The power suppressors work because they do the opposite thing to blue.

“Sam said that,” Tommy laughs and it’s bitter and twisted and he hates how familiar it sounds to the person he wants to be the least. “It’s how he made the power suppressors, of course it is. How could I be so fuckin’ dumb? Of course they have blue, Sam reverse engineers it. Well now they have power stopping drugs and handcuffs because you were too fuckin’ late—”

“Tommy,” Hannah’s tone is somehow both a warning and a threat. “Calm the fuck down.”

“Burn. It.” Tommy whispers. “Now. Burn it. You don’t need it— what if a gang steals it back or Nestor gets captured... fuckin’ memorise it for all I care— there should never be a physical copy to the formula that destroys lives.”

“Kid has a point,” Hannah doesn’t seem happy about acknowledging that but she acknowledges it either way. “If you get captured, or any of the kids get captured then that’s an amazing bargaining chip.”

That makes Nestor pause. “TapL is gonna be so mad at me.”

“And?” Hannah says, “I’m a leader too and as I’m the highest rank out of you and I, and actually on the field my decision takes precedence. Memorise the formula, I’ll do the same. Then we burn the shit out of it.”

“I’m the mission leader.”

It’s a weak argument and even he knows it.

“And I’m a branch leader,” Hannah returns sharply, “I rank higher than you. If Tommy—Theseus, whatever, says it needs to be burnt then it needs to be burnt. We might not make it out, we need something to bargain with.”

Nestor doesn’t seem so sure.

Hannah glares at him, “Nestor, Tommy’s our only way outta here. Whether you like it or not, he’s not exactly someone we wanna piss off right now.”

“We know his identity,” Nestor says slowly. “We could blackmail him if we needed to.”

Tommy audibly laughs, he throws his head back like it’s the funniest thing he’s ever heard. It’s pretty close to being that. “Do it,” he’s grinning and puts his goggles up onto his forehead. “Because right now I have something to lose— and if I lose that— if I have nothing left to lose then what’s stopping me from hurting and destroying? What’s stopping me from going into Redding and killing people? What’s stopping me from blowing up this shithole we call home. Nothing. So— you wanna tell the world I’m Theseus? Go for it, I encourage you to! And then you won’t be living in this world long enough to see the outcome.”

Nestor looks fucking terrified.

“Got it?” He says.

Judging by the even more terrified look on his face, Tommy thinks he understands.

“Glad you’ve got that,” he pats Nestor on the shoulder. “I’ll help you. But it’s on my terms—otherwise you’re all dead or in Pandora.”

Satisfied with the fact Hannah and Nestor look fucking terrified for their safety, Tommy puts the goggles back on. And with a deep breath he walks back out into the main area Elysium have holed themselves up in.

“Were his eyes glowing red?”

“I fuckin’ think so.” Hannah replies.

Tommy smiles underneath the mask, before jumping up onto the long desk that spans the majority of the wall length. It’s clearly the main desk with computers and a return section for any books. It seems nice.

He realises that— *oh shit*, there’s a computer and he has potentially the worst idea that he’s ever had. It for sure goes onto the list of bad ideas he’s had.

Opening the computer, he realises this computer doesn’t have a password which is nice. Which means he has free access to Twitter and to cause a lot of problems on purpose.

[@theseusiguess](#): LMAOOOOO GUESS WHAT HAPPENED

[@theseusiguess](#): wait— am i on the news?

He finds out that, yes he is on the news. And no, it’s not looking great for their chances of getting out of here in one piece. Tommy sighs and runs his hand down his face.

“Bring up the news,” one of the people with purple sleeves say— they sound young, maybe even younger than Tommy. Tommy wants to grab them by the shoulders and tell them not to get dragged into all of this gang stuff— it’s never as good as they say and it never ends well.

He doesn’t.

Instead he brings up the news like he was asked to do.

Sure enough— it’s the news, but shockingly enough it’s livestream footage. It’s shot from a helicopter overhead and Tommy can see everywhere the police are lined up, and how it looks like they’re going to completely fuck them up.

Wait.

They can see where the police are.

“Holy fuck!” The Elysium kid yells, “We have the police’s positions, get me paper and pen.”

Tommy scrambles around the desk to find this paper and pen. He goes through some of the drawers before finding it and handing it over to the kid.

“I’m Erin,” they say. “My defining traits are that I’m a blonde girl, can do a backflip and also can poison people which is fun!”

Uh— okay then.

He nods, because he doesn’t want to be poisoned today.

It appears to work because she doesn't poison him today and goes back to scribbling on the notepad.

Erin, (not Eryn Tommy disappeared from his life a long time ago.) Seems pretty concentrated, she draws the general shape of the building they're hiding in. Then lines where the police are hiding. She draws rectangles and Tommy assumes they're the police cars.

It's actually really useful, there's more police on their left than their right. There's only... two groups protecting the right side. But there's only one window on that side and it's half shot in.

Tommy squints at it, they're basically covered from every angle. Less coverage at the sides but still enough that it's concerning. They need to draw everyone to one side, but Tommy's not sure how to do that.

"Olivia!" Erin yells, and the aforementioned Olivia walks over. She has long straight black hair that's in a bob cut and the mask that Erin is supposed to be wearing (but isn't) over her nose.

Like Erin she's also wearing purple sleeves— she's only a trainee— Prime they're all so young. How did Deo ever feel good about taking in Tommy? These guys are way older and they seem so young— too young to be here, risking their lives.

"What?" Olivia says.

"Hi," Erin says, "Basically," she slides the roughly drawn map. "I'm thinkin' if we come up with a plan— with Theseus— hug fan by the way. Then we can finally stop wearin' purple sleeves and having everyone worry about us."

'You're so young.' Is what Tommy doesn't say, and he doesn't know if he wants to say this to himself now, a few years ago, or the two girls pondering over a crudely drawn map. *'Please just go home.'* But all the retorts die on his tongue.

Holy Prime— they're so young.

"I think," Olivia says, "We could use the radios."

"What do ya mean?" Erin asks, mirroring Tommy's own puzzled expression although his is slightly more hidden.

"I mean... we get Hannah to radio back. They're for sure looking and scanning for any radio waves."

"It would compromise our radio signals," Erin replies, squinting at the map. "Is this important enough to get us to change all of our signals?"

"Dunno," Olivia says. "But say if it is— we get Hannah to pretend there's an extraction on the Eastern side of the building all the police personnel should move to accommodate for that."

"Leaving the Western side free," Erin finishes.

She lights up completely and grins. "That seems like a pretty good plan."

Tommy's eyes drift back to the news as the girl's chatter fades into the background. Not a lot changes, until a new breaking story comes up at the bottom.

Heroes Spectre and Outwit are expected to deal with the Middle L'Manberg Library siege.

"Shit!" Tommy yells, pushing out of his seat and moving past Erin sitting behind the desk.

He walks up to Hannah and Nestor who are now standing in the middle of the room, apparently discussing something actively. Nestor looks slightly terrified as he approaches but

honestly Tommy couldn't care less if he actively tried.

“Yeah?” Hannah says.

“They’re sendin’ in Spectre.”

“Okay?” Nestor says.

“He can phase through walls,” Tommy gestures at the barricade around them. “If Spectre gets in here we’re fucked. He can phase through bullets and punches and—” he takes a deep breath, trying to steady himself. “If he gets in here with all of you in here, we’re royally fucked.”

“Shit,” Hannah mutters, “Erin, Olivia, Hunter, Lydia. Get here.”

The teenagers basically run up to her and Hannah sighs. “Okay. What’s the plan?”

She asks this at Tommy, like he has any clue of what to do. He fucking doesn’t— Tommy doesn’t know jackshit about jackshit.

Tommy can’t help but smile, “I think Olivia and Erin have a plan.”

Erin lights up, “Okay, okay, Hannah— my idea is basically... well Olivia’s idea. We have the location of all the police units and then we can see how they move. We’re presuming they’re also tracking for uncommon radio signals because they know we have radios. Right?”

“Right.” Nestor says.

“So we get Hannah to contact base, we will need to change our frequencies or communication methods after this— and so this depends on whether this mission is worth that or not. We lie and say we’re planning to escape out the East and escape out of the Western side of the building.”

“We send Theseus out front.” Nestor says.

“What?” Hannah yells, “No— he’s a kid, fuckin’ younger than Hunter.”

“He’s what—” the person who Tommy assumes is named Hunter says.

Nestor looks at Tommy for a long moment.

“We send him out the front. We need them to think we’re clearing the way. It can’t be me—I’ll fuckin’ get shot. It can’t be anyone here, Theseus can block the bullets. He can cause havoc. We sneak out the side and onto the street.”

Hannah looks like she’s mortified at the very idea of this. She shakes his head, “Nestor we promised Chloris no one would get hurt.”

“Anyone in Elysium,” Nestor corrects. “We promised that no one in Elysium would get hurt — Theseus is not in Elysium. He never has been, in fact he’s been an active threat and he still is.”

“Wait, wait, wait—” Erin says, “So you’re fully fine if Theseus gets shot out there?”

Nestor pauses, and looks at Tommy. “Yes.”

Okay he goes to abandon Techno *one time*. It’s not like Tommy actively stabbed him with blue, which can not be said for the person staring back at him like a hypocrite. Tommy doesn’t say anything, he only seethes.

Tommy cracks his knuckles.

“Can you stop being an asshole?” Hannah says, basically yelling. The other Elysium members seem really intrigued by what appears to almost be a fucking brawl. Which... yeah fair Tommy is also interested. “Theseus is a kid— we are not sending a kid out there to his potential death.”

Oh great, now they’re arguing about him like he’s not there. If they start turning on him then he can also check the list of ‘acting like his parents’ they’re about three steps of the way there. They just gotta rough him around a bit and then boom.

Tommy sighs.

He has the sneaking feeling that just about everyone is underestimating his abilities— or he’s just overestimating.

“And he’s not my job to worry about.”

“You know his identity,” Hannah snaps, “You know he has people who care if he ends up dead.”

Tommy sighs.

This time it manages to bring attention to him.

“Don’t underestimate me,” Tommy signs, because he doesn’t really want to be talking again. He knows he did it before but no one was really paying attention to him. *“I know what I’m doing.”*

“I— I don’t understand sign,” Hannah says. “Does anyone here understand sign?”

There’s silence and Tommy suddenly realises a flaw to his communication method. Whatever — at this point being outed as Theseus would be a relief. “Stop underestimating me,” he says, looking around at everyone. “I know my abilities, my abilities know me. I can distract the police. We need to get you out before W— Spectre shows up and beats the shit outta all of us. I need to get outta here before Spectre shows up.”

Everyone looks at him, apparently shocked he has a voice.

“You two need to make a decision, I will go out the front and distract the police if needed. I will cover your escape, just tell me what you need me to do and I’ll do it.”

“He’d make a great angel—” Hunter says and gets several angry looks.

“Do I know your voice?” One of them asks and Tommy ignores it because he doesn’t know what else to do.

Tommy stares at Nestor. “Wherever you need me.”

Nestor sighs, and looks around. “Okay. Hannah, you’re the branch leader. You’re making the calls.”

“Are you sure about this?” She asks. “That you will be okay.”

“My powers act subconsciously,” Tommy replies, “Think of it like a... instinct they will keep me safe. I might get hurt, but I’ll be okay.”

Hannah sighs. “I’ll make the radio call. Everyone else to the Western office, you’ll have to rip the door off once we get confirmation that the police units have moved. Nestor you’re by the computer scanning for the all clear, Theseus... you’re ready to distract.”

Tommy nods, before walking to the front doors. They're thankfully still blocked and Tommy sighs at them. In truth he doesn't really know if his powers will be able to withstand what is probably hundreds of bullets firing at him.

He's not sure if he'll be able to make it out of this one— he'll be alive, but whether he'll be captured or not is the real question. He almost feels sick thinking about it and he manages to keep himself calm.

Spectre will be here— Tommy has to prepare emotionally for that fight and he's not quite sure how he's supposed to do that easily. He keeps breathing in and out and praying that'll calm him down. It's not really working but Tommy doesn't really want to have a panic attack while Nestor is standing on the other side of the desk.

Oh Prime he's going to have a panic attack while Nestor is basically next to him.

“Kid?” Nestor says.

Tommy looks over at him, and his heart is beating in his throat.

“You've bravened up.”

Tommy wants to laugh. He's not braver, he just cares less—

And he's not sure if that's something to be proud of. Instead he nods and looks back at the door and calms down. He really— really isn't sure about this one.

But blue's on the line— as is getting it out of the tower. It's the start of something and Tommy needs blue gone, even if it kills him to try and do that. He has a neighbourhood to protect, and finally— finally it feels like someone else feels the same way. Elysium— and Tommy hates himself a little for allowing himself to think that.

It's been so long. It's been so long and a fight by himself.

And he just wants to pass that onto someone else, for a day. For a day someone else can keep this fight.

"Androktasiai," Hannah says, "This is Chiron. We need an extraction at the Eastern side of the building. I will repeat we need an extraction at the Eastern side of the building," she speaks into her walkie talkie. "We have Prometheus with us— we are planning on using him to initiate the extraction. Make sure the green apples are ready to pick us up."

Nestor looks at Tommy's curious expression.

"Green apples means that this is all a bunch of bullshit," Nestor whispers. "Basically that this is part of a plan and not to worry." His eyes dart back to the monitor.

"Chiron over and out."

Tommy pretends he doesn't see her hands are shaking.

Hannah pauses, standing there for a moment before collecting herself and walking towards the office where all the other members appear to be huddled up and living their best lives.

Tommy glances at the petrol by his feet. He assumes it was from the vans that have for sure been seized by now. But it's flammable.

They have a lot of books.

Tommy looks around. He has potentially a lot of fire bombs and an unspecified amount of time to kill.

He summons a handful of books to him, before opening the petrol cap and pouring what is probably an ungodly amount over them all. His heart is going so fast it feels like he's going to pass out.

Which would honestly be funny because Tommy would probably accidentally set himself on fire, which again isn't that funny but would be a good summary of his life so far.

Eventually he has about... fifty books covered in petrol and he almost feels back for the fact he's about to destroy all these lovely books. He takes a few steps back, before checking if he can still summon sparks.

He can.

Okay. He can do this. He's fucking Theseus, the people's vigilante and the bitch they haven't been able to capture.

He can do this.

Nestor watches the computer screen with eagle eyes.

It feels like this plan was put together too quickly— what if it all goes wrong? What if they realise they're bullshitting? What if they know that Tommy's only a distraction? What if this is how he gets captured.

“Your name is Thomas Underscore,” Tommy mutters, mostly to himself. He doesn't think Nestor hears him but he's not sure. It doesn't matter— he needs to remind himself of what he is before he fights. “You're the... brother of Techno and Wilbur, you're Purpled's best friend and you're in a photo at Phil's house.”

He'll be okay.

“They’ve moved,” Nestor whispers. He walks away from the computer which still plays the faint volume of the news channel. He basically sneaks over, like any noise will shatter their plan. “Theseus?”

Tommy looks over his shoulder.

“Thank you.”

Tommy waits until Nestor is firmly in the office room before taking a deep breath and taking a few steps back.

For a moment, it’s calm.

Tommy collects himself, he can feel the buzzing from the computer and the light that’s been hanging above him. He can feel himself breathing in and out, and he can feel the almost silent footsteps of Nestor creeping around in the office room, getting ready to rip the door off the window and escape.

Then he looks up.

He thinks his eyes flash red judging by the light that reflects off the bookshelf blocking the door.

Then he rips the bookcase apart with his powers and both pieces soar to either part of the room.

And once again, chaos breaks out.

The glass shatters in front of him and he throws up one hand, the bullets fall to the ground and Tommy grins to himself. With his other hand, he flings one of the petrol-covered books

into the air before sending it soaring at one of the closest police officers.

He then flicks his wrist.

And the book bursts into flames.

And Tommy grins.

Blocking the bullets is the easy bit, apparently he only needs one hand up to stop the bullets mid-track, the difficult part is the hand movement which sets everything on fire.

He flings more books up into the air and does some fancy hand movements he doesn't really understand but they all burst into flames and send themselves flying at officers.

Tommy walks down the steps almost calmly, brushing the bullets away from him which clatter to the ground.

And all at once the bullets stop.

Ah... reloading, the real downside to guns.

"My turn," Tommy whispers, barely loud enough for anyone to hear—including himself.

It's funny almost—that they really think they can do jackshit. They honestly believe that Tommy isn't the most powerful one here.

There are several police cars lined up around, some of the police are hiding behind their doors. Tommy smiles to himself, do they *really* think that'll stop whatever is about to happen. And a door—hiding behind a police car door will save them?

Fuckin' pathetic.

Tommy looks around for a moment, taking a note of where everyone is.

He puts his hands behind his back and clasps them.

Alright.

Let's get this show on the road.

Tommy tilts his head to the side.

One of the police cars slide into the other ones in the row. They flip and twist over each other until the roofs are on the ground and Tommy just looks at them. He quite likes the way that looks, but he has another idea.

He brings his hands out from behind his back and lifts one of them up. The four cars go flying into the air into a little bundle of squashed metal and everything else ugly.

Then he jerks his head a little in the other direction and the four cars burst into flames. Causing several of the cops to scream and dive out of the way. Chunks of flaming metal falls to the ground around them.

Tommy turns his attention to the people with guns pointed at him currently.

He raises an eyebrow underneath the goggles.

Now what dumbass would point a gun at him after this—

With an eye roll he jerks his head backwards and the guns go flying out from their hands and fall to the ground.

He can't be bothered to explode those so they can have those back— he supposes.

Bullets fire from the other side, and Tommy doesn't turn around. For once he knows that his powers have him, and they do, pain doesn't shoot through his back.

Although... it would be fun to pretend.

So Tommy staggers forwards like he's just been shot in the back. He staggers a little bit and no one seems quite sure what to do, he manages to spin around so he's looking at the mildly terrified looks of the officers in front of him.

Tommy reaches out a hand, before falling to the floor.

It's silent for a moment, even the helicopters seem to silence.

He could just stay here forever— surely they wouldn't unmask him if they thought he was dead? That's super disrespectful.

Then he realises it's the police and they're bastards.

With a sigh, Tommy slams his hand against the ground.

A bright light flashes and Tommy keeps his head down. His eyes feel a bit weird and he doesn't even look at the flash, he gets up a moment later while all the officers are staggering

around like headless chickens.

They should *really* be better trained.

Tommy sighs and flicks his hand.

Well this is pretty boring if he's being completely honest he really thought there would have been a little bit better of a fight. Maybe not much but at least some—

He lifts up one of the chunks of metal that used to be a cop car and flings it at some of the officers who dive out of the way. Tommy then picks it back up and flings it at one of the cop cars he left standing.

To his right someone tries to run at him with a gun. Tommy doesn't even need to use his powers for this one, he grabs the outstretched arm. Before twisting so he's facing the same way that they were running, and throws them over his shoulder.

They hit the ground with a thump, and Tommy reaches up with his other hand to block the bullets. They fly around him, not actually touching him and Tommy watches as they fly over him and into the cars and buildings behind him.

Huh.

He whirls around, looking at all the ruined cars behind him. The things on fire and the fact that the police have given up on trying to shoot at him and are all staring at him with something like horror in their eyes.

Somehow he manages to suppress the grin that takes over his face, he's grinning— he's happy and he's powerful. For once in his life he knows what he's doing and how to do it, and he is capable.

He is capable—

Tommy looks around at the empty space around him. No one is bothered to try to walk up to him, the police officer he threw against the ground is still there.

He lifts a finger and brings the officer to their feet.

Then Tommy smiles under the mask before throwing them back towards their colleagues. Someone manages to catch them— much to Tommy's disappointment.

It's quiet.

Tommy, ever the cocky bastard, bows.

He glances up at the helicopter that's still spiralling around him and filming, before he waves at the camera.

Out of the corner of his eye, he sees a gun raise.

Flicking his wrist, the gun flies out of their hand and flips in the air. It lands on the ground and Tommy picks it up.

Guns used to feel wrong in his hand, he used to sometimes pick them up when Deo was looking. Or he has as Theseus a few times, he's held them, and they felt wrong. Like they didn't fit— like that was too much damage held in the palm of his hand.

Tommy stares at it.

It feels right in his hand— it doesn't feel wrong, it feels like there's supposed to be a gun in his hand and he is supposed to point it at anyone who gets in his way.

He has a gun, and it feels normal— it feels alright, he doesn't hate it.

“Theseus!” Someone yells.

Theseus looks up.

Is that a fucking rocket launcher holy shit—

Tommy dives out of the way before he can explain why, sure enough the... rocket— is that the right word? Flies right just past the side of his ear, and he drops to the ground. The wall explodes behind him.

Bits of wall fly at him and Tommy rolls onto his back.

He can hear the footsteps of about thirty people running towards him and Tommy is really not sure if this is worth it—

Is this worth it? Is getting up and trying to fight worth it?

Being arrested would make it so much easier— he wouldn't have to tell Wilbur anything he'd find out himself, he'd be thrown into Pandora's which really can it be *that* bad? It's probably fine—

The footsteps get closer and Tommy sighs.

He bangs his fist against the ground and a wave of energy covers the ground. People fall and stumble and Tommy manages to get up onto his feet with some fancy movement which he didn't need to do at all.

Tommy looks around— okay that's a lot of people still running at him.

With a long sigh, he looks up at the camera— he feels like he's in an episode of The Office apart from the fact his freedom is kinda on the line right now.

He ducks under someone trying to punch him, before shoving them in the side and they fall. Then he knocks the next person running at him down, just so they're on their hands and knees.

Tommy then uses that poor soul as a springboard and soars over the people below him, he really flies for a moment and relishes the feeling.

Before he hits the ground and starts running.

Yeah— he's not dealing with this, not today, not tomorrow— hopefully not ever.

He manages to get a foot on the side of the building, and using his powers he propells himself up the wall and manages to grab onto the gutter.

Shit wait gutters are weak—

He hears the bend of metal before he realises he's about to fall, then he falls and hits the ground.

Ow— ow— fucking ow that hurt.

Tommy sighs.

This is really one of those days, and he stands up. Whirling around to rip a hunk out of the building and flinging it at someone's head.

At the last moment he nudges it out of the way so it goes flying over his shoulder because Tommy doesn't actually want someone's death on his conscious—

Tommy turns around, he throws one of his arms up and the person and their car go flying back.

Things are on fire, it's chaos and...

Is this what being alive feels like?

His heart is beating in his chest but he feels calm, he feels light— he feels like he knows what he's doing and no one— nothing will get in the way of that. He's calm— holy shit he's calm and he takes a deep breath.

And Tommy, he laughs. A small thing, but he laughs and flings a police car away with the tilt of his head and he laughs again because— he is just as powerful as the heroes feared and he can be the villain everyone expects him to be anyway.

Wait— no.

He picks up one of the officers in the air before raising them higher and higher.

Tommy raises them higher— *please don't have a family this will be bad*. Then he realises that everyone has a family, but he hopes that this person's family is not watching this from that stupid fucking helicopter—

He could crash that.

If he really wanted to quite easily honestly—

But there are people in it and helicopter crashes tend to go badly and that just isn't remotely fair at all.

Tommy takes a deep breath.

Okay— let's see how well trained these guys are.

He launches the guy in the air a bit more, letting him fly upwards.

Clicking his fingers together he gets attention and there are— what feels like way too many police officers staring at him. Tommy can do this.

He knows that he can do this.

He needs to leave before Spectre gets here because then he is fucked— royally and completely fucked.

“Retreat.” Tommy signs.

He's met with the steely eyes of the police chief— he assumes, staring back at him with some sort of unwavering resolve.

Then they hear the police officer screaming, the one who's going to hit the ground if Tommy doesn't do anything. They're flying to the ground at what Tommy would have to assume to be terminal velocity.

They will die.

Wow this is a really bit fucked, isn't it?

"Now." He signs again.

The officer gets too close to the ground and Tommy throws out a hand, their momentum slows until Tommy places them back on their feet.

They're shaking and Tommy feels a little bit bad— as someone who is fucking terrified of heights that might be among his worst nightmares— and he may have just made someone scared of heights but...

It'll probably be fine.

Tommy can pay for their therapy or something.

The police chief stares at him.

Tommy sighs and gets his poor victim floating off the ground, before getting ready to fling them into the sky.

"No, no, no— no— please don't," they say and Tommy is fuckin' mad they gave themselves a voice and personality so they couldn't just be one of the group of police. "Please— please," the officer must look at their chief. "He can do this to you— to any of us, please. He might not catch me next time."

That's a lie— Tommy is not having anyone die on his watch.

But the police are not aware of that.

And that might be his only bargaining here, where everyone gets out alright.

He just wants to meet back up with Elysium— maybe get a few thank yous and then maybe whack someone in the nose for good measure. He takes a deep breath.

The sergeant— chief, Tommy has no idea who he's up against right now reaches to his side and holds the phone to his ear. There's a moment of complete silence, it feels like even the trees stop rustling for a moment.

The chief looks around.

And he goes to leave.

Oh thank Prime—

“Theseus!” He hears behind him.

His blood runs cold.

No, no, no, he thought he avoided this. He should've avoided this— why couldn't he avoid this?

Tommy turns around and stares at the hero staring back at him.

It's Spectre—

And for a moment, that Tommy is embarrassed by, he doesn't think anything— he doesn't think about trying to get the first attack in, he doesn't think about running away first and he sure as fuck does not think about crying.

(That's a lie he's surprised he doesn't burst out into tears.)

“HQ,” Spectre says, “That's a confirmed— send over Dream as well.”

Three heroes—

Can... can Tommy fight three heroes.

Fundy is also there in his Outwit get up, with the little coat and the general just... red and warm colours. Tommy's never really had a chance to look at what Fundy wears while on patrol— but it's a pretty simple looking outfit.

Why do all of these heroes wear trench coats, those can not be practical to move in surely—

Fundy has a black trench coat, which has two long stripes down by the collar that are orange, yellow, blue and then a greyish colour. He doesn't have goggles like Wilbur, but he is perhaps one of the only heroes who actually wears... *sneakers* like a sane person instead of boots which are just a lot more worse.

Wait, Tommy wears boots—

Underneath he has a white shirt which feels like a mistake in a job where you might get stabbed and just... some normal looking pants. There's not much special about Fundy's outfit

that gives anything away.

Wilbur has the bright shimmery coat that is too big to be practical and he doesn't even wear the arms of—

Fundy doesn't have that.

Tommy stares at them both for a long moment.

He can't run— Spectre can phase through walls.

Vaguely the back of his mind is aware of a bullet being fired at him and Tommy raises a hand to combat it, it's effective because it bounces off an invisible shield and lands on the ground next to him.

“Wil...” Fundy says slowly. “This doesn't feel like a fight we'll win—”

And Wilbur, Spectre— whatever, ever the drama lover jumps off of the rooftop of the library that they're standing on.

Tommy thinks his heart might freeze over because he can't do anything— he can't say anything apart from just stare with wide eyes at Wilbur.

He can't— he can't do this.

Spectre— Wilbur— he doesn't know anymore manages a smile at him, it's twisted and smug and Tommy doesn't think he's ever hated anything else more until this moment. Well... shit — he's gonna have to deal with this now.

“Theseus,” Spectre sighs, “Come on man—”

Fundy jumps down next to him and Tommy takes a few steps backwards.

“Like—” Spectre says, “Please just stop fighting, this will be so much easier.”

Tommy shakes his head.

He can’t stop fighting because he doesn’t know what he’ll do if he does.

Spectre sighs, “Okay,” he glances at Fundy.

Tommy’s hands are shaking and he can’t fucking think straight— what is he supposed to do right now? He needs a plan— he needs to think of something, literally anything and he can’t.

He needs to run.

So Tommy turns around, and like an absolute little bitch starts running.

He can make it up onto the building across the road and he can out manoeuvre them there— he’ll be okay with that then, he can lose them on the roof, he knows this area well and he knows how to run and hide and he can do this—

Then he’s hit across the face and falls back onto the grass.

“Surely you know better than getting up onto roofs,” Spectre says and...

Tommy needs to punch the smug little smile off of his face. It's not a want— it's a need, he's not going to let himself get beaten up by Spectre— not again, and he's not weak and he's not going to let himself get pushed around.

He did that for a couple years when he was young.

It didn't end well for him.

So he gets onto his feet faster than he thought possible, heart pounding and breath slightly uneven as he stares at Spectre.

Only for a moment.

And for a moment Tommy's scared that Wilbur is seeing through the goggles, that he sees *Tommy* instead of Theseus, because his eyes go a bit wider for a moment and Tommy takes a few steps backwards.

Then Tommy throws himself at Spectre, using momentum he's added to swing harder. Spectre sees through this and he phases through Tommy's attempted punch, it's a sloppy punch and they both know it.

“Where's all that power you had before, buddy?” Wilbur says and Tommy hates it.

Tommy looks around, Fundy is apparently taking a backseat approach to this, which seems like an awful idea but... he thinks he can use that—

Wait, no, Fundy's his friend he hasn't done anything to Tommy or Theseus and—

His internal crisis is rudely interrupted with a kick across the face, and Tommy manages to suppress his yell and only staggers back. He doesn't want to fight Wilbur with his powers— really he doesn't.

He'll win.

And— Tommy just wants to win.

Just for once in his life he wants to come out of a fight on top, one that means something to him.

So with one hand he grabs one of the chunks of metal left over from his fight with the police and with the other he blocks one of Spectre's punches. He's apparently not a fan of this because he tears his arm away and goes for another hit.

Tommy throws the chunk of metal at Spectre, it rolls in the air amazingly and Wilbur's eyes go wide for a moment as it flies at him. For a moment it looks like he panics, before he goes intangible and the chunk of metal flies through him.

At Fundy—

Fundy makes a noise and dives out of the way.

The yell makes Wilbur turn around, concern on his face and Tommy— Tommy doesn't care.

He sends himself flying at Spectre and he manages to get a good punch in.

Wilbur's head snaps back and something makes a dangerous crack.

"Shit!" Spectre takes a few stumbling steps back, "Ow— fuck, shit— motherfucker."

He looks up and his nose is... having what seems like a concerning amount of blood gushing out of it, Tommy *almost* lets himself feel bad with the amount of blood. It's a lot and drips onto the concrete path.

Spectre stares at him, "Bastard—" although it sounds like he's speaking around the blood. "Shit." For a moment he leans forwards, pinching his nose to try and attempt to stop the bleeding.

There's drops of blood on the ground and Wilbur's nose might be broken and—

Tommy goes in again, this time with a kick that gets him in the stomach and he falls to the ground.

Spectre apparently takes this personally because he gets up before swinging at Tommy. He manages to duck out of the way of the first one, then the second and ha, Tommy's out matching this hero—

Then Tommy gets punched in the face.

His head whips back and both of his arms go up to protect his face.

A habit he never quite broke.

Spectre tries to hit him again, and Tommy blocks it with his forearms.

He kicks out a leg.

His ankle is grabbed and then he's yanked up, he hits the ground with a thump and Spectre looks at Fundy who is standing a distance away.

“You good?”

That moment Spectre looks away is the moment Tommy has to use—

His back hurts from hitting the ground— his head is spinning and everything hurts. Wilbur’s nose is still bleeding and things are not going well.

He manages to kick his legs up, kicking Spectre in the chest.

Spectre falls to the ground and Tommy throws out an arm before he can stop himself.

Density shift, density shift—

And like that Wilbur is pinned against the ground, with perhaps one of the most simple moves that Tommy knows.

He pushes down with his powers, and Wilbur looks like he’s in pain because he kicks his legs and tries to fight against the weight that is pressing down against him. It doesn’t look comfortable in the slightest.

Tommy pushes down more.

He’s going to break Wilbur’s ribs at this rate and Wilbur cries out in pain.

Did something snap or did Tommy imagine that—

Then he hears movement in front of him and slowly Tommy looks up.

Like he suspected, it's Fundy, standing on the steps a few metres away looking terrified for his fucking life.

Tommy raises one of his hands, he can fight Fundy one-handed, he's sure of it.

"No!" Wilbur screams and it sounds painful. "Don't you fucking touch him! He hasn't done anything! Your problem is with me not with him! Fundy, run!"

Tommy pushes more, and Wilbur's voice dies in his throat with some sort of strangled noise that makes Fundy's eyes go wide.

Fundy takes a few nervous steps back, stumbling over his own feet and tripping slightly. He doesn't hit the ground as he stumbles but he gets dangerously close to falling flat on his face.

Tommy thinks he's going to run— that would be smart.

Then Fundy takes a deep breath, he looks at Tommy and there's a sort of calmness in his eyes — a sort of calmness that's a bad idea. Too much confidence in a fight that Tommy will win.

"Alright," Fundy says, "Let him go you, bastard!"

Tommy decides that he can do that.

It only feels nice.

He almost breaks Wilbur's ribs, now it's time to throw him away.

That seems familiar—

So he does.

With a hand movement Wilbur goes soaring into the air.

Fundy and Tommy both watch as he flies through the air towards the concrete.

Wilbur realises what's happening and throws both of his hands out in front of him.

It doesn't end up saving him because he hits the ground hand first and yells as he drops onto the concrete cradling his right hand with wide eyes as he stares at Theseus—

The look on Wilbur's face is horror, Tommy can't describe it anymore than that. Just—horrificed and terrified and everything that Tommy never wanted to be looked at with.

Fundy is running at him.

Tommy should probably deal with that—

He ducks out of the way of a sloppy punch.

Fundy apparently doesn't like this because he throws his full weight at Tommy and the pair of them topple onto the ground.

A punch hits him in the face, he thinks his goggles crack from the effort he put in.

Throwing both of his arms up as defence, Tommy gets punched in the arm, then Fundy manages to punch him in the face again.

“You bastard!” Fundy yells, as Tommy blocks another punch with his forearms. “You fucking bastard— you ruin everything you touch—”

Tommy manages to reach up and punch Fundy across the jaw.

That makes him shut up.

He’s stronger than Wilbur, because he doesn’t react and reaches towards the mask.

Tommy doesn’t make a noise, although his heart drops.

He scrambles so he grabs Fundy by the back of the shirt and yanks him backwards. Fundy falls down, off of Tommy.

Tommy manages to get back onto his feet and scan the scene again—

Okay Dream isn’t here, that’s a start.

Looking over at Wilbur he sees that he’s sitting on the ground holding his wrist.

They make eye contact for a moment.

Wilbur sees Fundy on the ground and he scrambles onto his feet, “Fundy!”

“I’m okay! I’m okay!” Fundy calls out, “Theseus— can you like, not?”

He wishes.

Tommy raises his hand again, at Fundy.

His eyes go wide.

Spectre comes barrelling into his side, and Tommy throws both his arms up again to protect the face. He tries getting a hit in, but Tommy is not allowing this after the fuckery that was fighting Fundy a few moments ago.

Wilbur manages to grab him by one of arms and yanks it down to the floor.

He puts his foot over Tommy's arm, it's an unwelcome weight and Tommy tries to yank his arm free but to no avail.

One arm to defend with—

He tries to reach Wilbur, hit him in the jaw or the side of the head or even in the nose again... Wilbur's nose is bleeding a lot now that he thinks about it. It's not his best look—

Eventually he manages to grab a grip on Wilbur's coat. He yanks it to the side and it rips slightly, the clasp holding it together comes undone, and Tommy yanks it up so the coat is covering Wilbur's face.

Tommy throw him back with his powers and he skids against the pavement, ruining the jacket even further.

Wilbur lays there for a moment, before discarding the coat—

Fundy makes a guttural noise, the type fuelled by only anger and spite, before running at Tommy.

And Tommy realises... that Wilbur won't fight Fundy.

He will fight Theseus— he won't fight Fundy.

So Tommy lifts Fundy off the ground, who yells.

Wilbur tries to grab him, but winces when reaching out his right hand— and Tommy manages to yank Fundy free and make him float just slightly in front of Tommy, above the ground.

Fundy kicks his legs, trying to spin or move, but he's just hanging in the air helplessly.

"Theseus—" Spectre approaches slowly, his footsteps like approaching a small damaged animal. "You don't need to do this— just... leave Fundy alone, and nothing bad will happen."

That's a lie and they all know it.

"Your issue is with me," Wilbur says slowly, it's more of a whisper than anything else. "Okay... I get it— trust me, I get it. But Fundy's done nothing to you and I don't want him to get hurt because of me."

Tommy flings Fundy towards the closest wall.

Wilbur yells.

He stops Fundy's momentum a moment before he hits the wall and Tommy looks at Spectre.

The message is clear.

"Right— right," Wilbur says, "Can't make demands."

He's getting closer and closer.

"Theseus— I know you're someone under that mask and that's terrifying, and I know you're a kid— and— I don't want to beat up a kid again, but Fundy's also a kid and I care about him more than you'll ever know."

Tommy thinks he knows.

"So," he says, "Leave Fundy alone, he'll leave and—"

"What?" Fundy yells, "Wil—"

"And you can... I dunno," Wilbur says, "Beat me up for an hour straight, I don't care— just *please* let Fundy go."

Tommy instead tilts his head at Spectre— Wilbur, he's not sure if the difference matters anymore— or even mattered in the first place.

"Please."

And... Tommy almost considers it, he almost considers dropping Fundy to the floor and letting him leave because Wilbur— Spectre? Whatever is right, Fundy hasn't done anything to him—

Then Wilbur goes for a punch.

And Tommy drags Fundy in the way.

The noise seems so much louder than it should be, as Wilbur punches Fundy in the face and even Tommy winces.

It's silent for a moment.

“Fundy—”

“I don't care!” Fundy yells, “Just get this guy!”

So Wilbur phases through Fundy and tries to go for another hit, and Tommy drags Fundy in the way just in time. This time Wilbur realises what's happening and phases his arm through Fundy.

“You... fucker,” Spectre says.

Tommy doesn't say anything, but jumps back as Spectre tries to get an upper hand.

He swings Fundy in the way of most of the hits, using him as a human shield as Spectre is forced to stumble and awkwardly phase away and isn't able to lay a hit on Tommy as he darts backwards.

Fucking— idiot.

Spectre, to his credit, doesn't give up— even after about fifteen attempts, it seems like he's scared and angry and— that tends to give people a lot of motivation.

One time Wilbur thinks he gets close and Tommy manages to yank Fundy in front of him just in time. It hits him in the stomach and only Wilbur winces at this point.

Two.

Wilbur stumbles back after this one. “I don’t want to hurt you—”

“It doesn’t hurt,” Fundy lies and Tommy swings him in the way.

He is forced to hit Fundy five more times, times that Wilbur can’t phase through at the last moment and times that Wilbur thinks he has the upperhand but he doesn’t and Tommy manages to move Fundy in the way—

Tommy just forced Wilbur to hit Fundy five times.

He... he doesn’t feel as bad about it as he should.

Wilbur clearly feels awful about it, his eyes are filled with tears and he mutters countless apologies as he tries to hit Tommy and instead hits— someone he cares about.

And Tommy realises, with almost an alarming urgency— that he doesn’t care. He doesn’t care he just forced Wilbur to hurt someone— because Wilbur hurt him first and he needs someone that knows, someone that can understand this pain and—

Tommy spins away from a punch that would’ve hit.

Instead he gets kicked in the stomach by Fundy.

Tommy flies backwards, landing awkwardly on the stairs.

Pain shoots through the back of his head and the entire world spins just for a moment, Tommy can't think for a moment because everything is unfocused and spinning and it's nice just for once.

Huh. Maybe Tommy should do this more—

He reaches underneath the hood and puts his hand on the back of his head... it's wet, which means either he got water on his head or he's bleeding and it's not raining so it looks like his head is bleeding.

Oh. That's not great!

Huh—

Tommy lays there, getting up is too much effort and maybe it would be better for everyone if Tommy just let himself lay there for a moment. Things are spinning and fuzzy and it's so nice — he could just close his eyes and sleep here forever.

There are footsteps next to him.

Tommy closes his eyes.

“Is he... unconscious?”

“No,” Spectre says, he kicks Tommy in the side who makes a disgruntled noise. “Yeah... he’s just... passed out I think? We’re not ripping a mask off a dead man— luckily he’s just unconscious.”

Oh, okay, that’s chill—

Wait, what?

Tommy’s eyes shoot open and he looks up at Spectre.

“Let’s find out who you are, you fucker—”

Spectre reaches for his mask.

Fear shoots through Tommy before he can control it, and he needs to physically suppress the urge to stop himself from screaming.

Spectre manages to reach underneath the mask.

He has his fingers underneath it so it’s like he’s going to rip it straight off of Tommy’s face.

Tommy makes a small noise in the back of his throat and that gets Wilbur to pause for a moment.

He grabs his mask with both of his hands, holding it in place.

This is not how it goes— Wilbur is not going to unmask him, that’s not how he’s going to find out—

He looks up at Wilbur. Ready to start kicking and screaming and even biting if it comes to that because there's no way that *this* is how Wilbur finds out—

His eyes are glowing red— through the goggles.

No, no, no— no—

Wilbur stumbles backwards, he's shaking and his eyes are flashing between red and their normal colour of green. He can see them through the goggles. Tommy gets up onto his feet and he— he doesn't know what to do.

No, he thought he had control over that— no, no, no. His mouth falls open and he stares at Wilbur.

"Wil?" Fundy whispers from behind them.

Tommy's frozen. He can't move— he can't think he can't do anything but stare because what the fuck has he done.

He— what the fuck has he done?

Tommy needs to calm down— he needs to calm the fuck down.

Tommy needs to calm down— he needs to calm down or Wilbur will be stuck in whatever limbo Tommy has accidently put him in.

"Eret!" Wilbur screams.

It's hoarse, and it rips itself from his throat. It sounds painful to say, apart from the obvious reasons and Tommy can only stare in muted horror.

He did this— he did this to Wilbur.

Fundy makes a noise and pain shoots through the side of Tommy's head. Everything spins and for a moment all he can focus on is the pain— like a headache but worse.

Everything is still spinning and Tommy can not pass out right now— physically that is something he's not allowed to do.

If he closed his eyes though—

With a gasping breath, Wilbur gets onto his feet, eyes green now.

“What did you— what did you do?” Wilbur's voice is shaking and he looks like he's about to cry. “What did you do to me you— you fucking monster!”

Monster.

The word seems to stick itself in Tommy's throat, it's been directed at him before and it'll probably be directed at him again.

But it's *Wilbur* saying it.

And all his breath manages to leave his throat.

Tommy just stares at him.

Everything is still dizzy, and Fundy kicked him in the face and— he did the mind limbo thing on Wilbur and he doesn't know what he's supposed to do. Apart from stare at Spectre blankly —

What did he see?

Tommy stares, mouth parted slightly and he just... stares because that's all he can do.

He needs to go—

Slowly he takes a few steps back, his legs are shaking and he can't think and he doesn't know what to do and—

"I'm so sorry," Tommy whispers.

He knows Wilbur can't hear him, but he hopes it means something.

With a few steps he moves towards Wilbur, Wilbur on the ground and staring up at him.

Looking at Wilbur is... terrifying.

Tommy's standing on the steps of the library, Wilbur's on the ground. He's taller for now— but he doesn't feel like it. He looks down at Wilbur who looks terrified of him, whose hands are shaking and his eyes are filled with tears again and...

What did Wilbur see?

And in Wilbur's goggle reflection, stands Theseus.

Theseus. Not Tommy.

With fire from inside the library and chunks of rubble around him, and he looks cold and he looks terrifying and he looks like the villain.

There's fire behind him, and Theseus is powerful and there's fire and somehow looking back at his own reflection breaks something in him. It's terrifying— staring at himself.

For a moment he glances over his shoulder, the way out is easy. Jump up onto a building and run.

His heart is in his throat, and he can't focus on anything but that. He's— he's so scared. He's too powerful and he got too confident and he hurt someone he cared about and—

He runs towards the buildings.

The heroes let him go.

Getting up onto the building is easy enough, and he looks out at the destruction he's caused.

Elysium has gotten away— with the recipe and the blue and themselves and Tommy did that right at least.

The library itself is in ruins. There's chunks of the wall torn out, and parts of the beautiful columns have been taken out. There are piles of bullets on the grass and outside the doors and all the glass has been shot through.

Things are on fire— books that are still burning, upturned cop cars— and both Fundy and Wilbur are staring up at him.

They're not chasing him.

So they both stare at each other, the heroes in the destruction and Tommy can run.

With a deep breath he takes out both of his ear pieces, the ones that are probably broken and silent but Tommy doesn't want them to be able to track them anyway. He throws both of them on the ground before stomping on them with his boots.

He's still shaking— too much.

Eventually he manages to turn around, nerves are eating away at him. He'll be okay— he'll just need to get home.

With one final push of energy Tommy manages to throw himself across the gap and land on the other side of the building, he looks behind him and sees the smoke rising up from the fire he caused.

He can hear the fire engines and the police cars and he knows in a moment there's going to be people scanning for him on the rooftops to try and rat him out, it's only a matter of time before he gets snitched on— he needs to get home and he needs to get home quickly.

Pausing, he lets himself breathe, heaving breaths that shudder in his chest. His heart is still beating against his ribcage and he feels like he's going to throw up.

He quickly realises that he is going to throw up, and rips the mask away from his face before grabbing onto the wall in front of him and emptying the food from the past day or so. It makes an ugly noise as it hits the ground and that makes Tommy want to throw up again.

Somehow with sheer will he avoids throwing up again.

He holds himself there for a moment, just trying to breathe and to make a plan. He's a long way from Logstedchire, and it's probably safest to travel as Tommy and not Theseus.

That means he needs to put his mask on... despite how that will probably be the most unpleasant experience of his life. He takes a few more shuddering breaths and tries to force the tears back from wherever he came from.

He's being a little bitch— he just set those things on fire and hurt those people and he didn't hate it.

What's the point in being a vigilante if hurting other people doesn't make his skin crawl? He's not a good person— yeah he knows that, but there's a different level of morality to... being glad you hurt someone.

He didn't hate it— he didn't feel sick as he hurt his friends, he didn't feel good about it either, but he didn't feel bad either.

That manages to make a sob erupt from Tommy's mouth, and he slaps his hand over his mouth. He needs someone here— he doesn't have his phone, he doesn't have money, he doesn't have anything.

He's by himself and he needs to figure this one out alone.

Tears drip onto his goggles and Tommy lets them rest there. He can do this— he has to really — he can't get caught, not now, not ever and he's not going to let them catch him.

With a deep breath Tommy adjusts his mask on his face, and it's not pleasant at all. He can get the mask off in a moment; he just needs to get onto street level without being seen.

He manages to push himself off the wall and it takes more energy than he thought it would, his footsteps are shaky as he starts walking about and he's trying to stop himself from breaking down into tears again.

Tommy takes another deep breath.

He can do this.

Really... he can do this.

Really... he can—

He can do this; he's not a kid anymore.

With once again shaking steps he breaks out into a run straight towards the edge of the building. He manages to step up onto the edge and launch himself, for a moment he's flying and he forgot how much he loved this feeling.

The feeling of weightlessness.

Until gravity is a little bitch and he starts falling, something that makes his stomach lurch even more. He flails in the air a little bit, before catching the edge of the next building and pulling himself up on that.

He flings a leg over the edge and manages to get back onto his feet a moment later.

Tommy manages to break out into a run again, he glances over his shoulder and nothing is chasing him.

Behind him is standing a figure.

Tommy yells, stumbling back and holding both hands up.

They're standing across from him, on the other side of the building.

Tommy's heart drops.

They're in complete black, with the same gas mask all of Elysium have except this one reaches up their entire face, so Tommy can't see their eyes either. Instead he can see tinted... plastic— he's not sure, but neither of them can see each other's eyes.

For a moment they both just stare at each other, Tommy can't figure out their height or age or anything because there's also a hood over their head.

"Thank you." They sign.

Tommy just stares at them.

They drop a flower and it floats down slowly until it hits the ground.

It's a purple flower.

Tommy opens his mouth to say something—

The figure turns around and walks away.

And Tommy— finds himself thinking that maybe this is for the best.

It's Elysium— he only helped them once.

This... isn't gonna be a common thing.

Right?

With a small shake of his head, he figures now is not the time— when he probably has several heroes and police looking for him—

He leaps over another gap, scrambling when he lands.

Okay.

He needs to get onto the floor, he needs to get out of his Theseus gear and he needs to stay calm.

With great difficulty, he manages to hop down, landing on top of a dumpster which makes a loud echoing noise. He pauses for a moment, looking around to see that no one has seen him.

It appears no one has.

A helicopter whirls overhead, and Tommy makes a noise, pushing his body against the wall and praying that no one will see him.

A door opens and someone peeks their head out.

They both stare at each other for a long moment, Tommy gets ready to break out into a run.

“Come in,” they say.

They’re wearing pink pajamas bottoms with penguins on them and a black t-shirt. They have long dirty blonde hair that is hanging around their shoulders.

Tommy looks up at the helicopters he can hear whirling around.

“I’m Taylor... and I really think you need some place to hide.”

Yeah.

He kinda does.

So Tommy takes a few careful steps back, and walks into the house.

Taylor doesn’t say anything for a long moment, she instead just stares at Tommy with wide eyes and opens and closes her mouth for a bit. “I have a vigilante in my house. I can be arrested for this wait—”

Tommy pushes past her and walks down the hallway.

It’s an older house, with trashy carpet that has more stains than Tommy’s carpet has. It’s a simple layout, a long hallway with doors on either side. At the end of the hallway is a kitchen, which Tommy makes a beeline for.

Kitchens tend to be one of the most protected rooms in a house. They tend to be away from the front of the house, especially in an old house like this one. He walks into the kitchen and

it's rather nice.

He doesn't pay much attention to it, but it's a nice kitchen. Relatively clean. With white counters that have aged a little and a black tile floor. Tommy goes for the fridge, mostly because he can and he thinks it objectively hilarious for someone to do that.

"Taylor?" Someone calls out and Taylor freezes.

Tommy freezes halfway in the fridge.

"Uh—" Taylor says, "Yeah?" She calls back.

"What are you doing?" The voice says and Tommy slowly reaches for the orange juice they have in the fridge, before closing the fridge door and moving onto the cabinets. "Why are you in the fridge this late—"

There's footsteps.

Both Taylor and Tommy freeze and they look at each other wildly.

There's more footsteps and someone new stands in the doorway of the kitchen.

They have brown hair with purple stripes, which overall is a bit like Wilbur's, apart from a bit straighter and longer in the front. They're wearing a blue hoodie and fluffy panda pajama pants.

"What. The. Fuck?"

"Rose," Taylor says slowly. "Uh... I can kinda explain— sorta maybe... not really?" Taylor glances at Tommy, "This is Rose... she's uh... probably not incredibly happy with me at the

moment.”

“Happy?” Rose says, “You’re harbouring a vigilante, a vigilante who just set fire to a library and threw things at police.”

“That’s not a bad thing!” Taylor defends, “We hate the police. And we hate the heroes.”

Tommy just reaches for a cup and puts it on the table.

“And now he’s drinking our orange juice! Put that down, that’s our orange juice.”

Tommy just responds by unscrewing the lid.

Rose looks around, “Taylor you know helping a vigilante could get us thrown in Pandora’s.”

“And I know if no one helps him, then he will,” Taylor says, her voice is remarkably calm all things considered. “And— someone needs to look out for Logstedchire, and it sure as fuck won’t be the heroes.”

Rose just looks at them. “Okay... but Theseus needs to stop trying to steal our orange juice, and needs to be out of here as soon as possible.”

“Okay.” Taylor says.

Tommy fills up his glass with orange juice, before sliding it over the counter to Rose. Rose picks it up and looks grateful. She sighs and looks into the glass like it personally wronged her.

“So now what?” Rose says, “What was your plan here?”

Tommy starts to go and sign his response, but both Taylor and Rose give him a look, meaning that neither of them know sign language. He resists the urge to sigh, that's inconvenient.

He does a writing motion, and Taylor scrambles for some paper and a pen that he slides over a moment later.

Get into civilian clothes. Walk home.

Tommy scribbles then pauses for a second.

And neither of you two are going to look at my face.

Rose nods, "Seems great to me, again— don't really fancy the idea of Pandora's. Whatever gets you out of here as quickly as possible."

Bathroom? Tommy writes on the paper again and holds it up.

"Oh," Taylor says, "Yes, the second door on the left."

Tommy stands up and walks down the hallway.

"Theseus," Rose says, and that makes him turn around and look at them. "Logstedchire has your back... don't forget that."

Tommy gives a smile under the mask, he knows that she can't see it but he does it anyway. He gives a two finger salute before turning back around and walking to the bathroom.

There he takes off the hoodie with the red trimming and he throws that aside. He also takes off the fingerless gloves, throwing those at the floor and then rips off his goggles which he throws on top of the hoodie.

That left him in the t-shirt he wore underneath and the black pants with red lining on them. Also the boots... the boots could potentially fuck him over, they were pretty identifiable. He makes a noise, one of just pure frustration.

He needs a bag and he needs new shoes.

Tommy sighs, before leaning his head against the wall. Police are going to be patrolling and checking every bag, he might get pulled over, then he's fucked. That's a one way trip to his entire identity being leaked to everyone in L'Manberg and probably further. They're going to be looking for a blond or brunet teenager and much to Tommy's horror he is a blond teenager who fits Theseus's description.

The roofs sure as hell aren't fucking safe either.

He's not going to dye his hair... probably, he would rather have to eat his shoes than have red hair.

Tommy takes another deep breath. He can bullshit his way through this. He might need to steal a shopping bag and some of their food as well. He puts the mask and goggles back on before walking back into the kitchen.

Both Taylor and Rose are still there, and they watch him as he grabs a bag and starts piling up some of their food. Mostly the large things, the cereal and the extra bits and pieces until it's mostly fully.

"Wait you can't steal our food we're broke—"

Tommy is stealing their food.

He'll drop money off here tomorrow or something.

Tommy walks back into the bathroom, he chucks all the Theseus stuff in there, the hoodie and the goggles and then also the boots. He can try and steal shoes here... he'll return them eventually he's sure.

Then he chucks some of the groceries at the top of the bag, so incase he gets dragged over he can just say he was shopping and they can just glance in the bag because police are fuckin' stupid and do not have a single thought ever.

Walking only in his socks, he approaches the door before scanning all the shoes by the side of the door.

There are sneakers that look like they'll fit, and Tommy puts them on. They're black canvas shoes, not actually converses but some sort of knockoff. It doesn't really matter because they fit and that's all that matters.

He opens the door and leaves.

He'll return the shoes and maybe give both of them a couple hundred bucks— he can afford it and it'll cover rent for a while.

With a deep breath he walks onto the street, making sure the cereal boxes and various other crap he stole was over his Theseus gear at the bottom of the bag. It might not end well— but at least he's tried.

Helicopters are whirring and Tommy takes a deep breath.

He throws the tote bag over his shoulder and puts his head down, before walking. The problem is he's a blond teenager and they're one hundred percent looking for a blond

teenager.

It's relatively quiet for once.

Tommy just walks, hands in his pockets and eyes scanning. There are still helicopters but they feel a lot further away, there's the odd car going past or the odd party going on in a house he walks past.

Keeping himself calm is honestly— surprisingly easy, he just needs to get himself out of here in one piece and hopefully avoid the cops.

And ah shit that's a cop car—

Tommy decides he's not going to put his head down because that means that he's looking even more suspicious, he just keeps walking and glancing at the cop car— the way he normally would.

It pulls over and Tommy sighs.

“Hello, officer,” he says— he sounds way too polite and he hates himself for it a little bit.

“Hi,” they say.

Tommy would like to punt them. Just— into another dimension.

“Sorry about this,” they say and everyone knows that they are not sorry at all. “But due to the recent Theseus and Elysium situation we have to question any teenagers we find, especially this late out.”

Tommy just nods and smiles, it's not polite at all. "Just doing some grocery shopping and I heard about the attack so I rushed to get home. Don't want to interfere at all, especially considering that Theseus will probably come back to Logstedchire, so I'd like to stay out of the inevitable fight."

"Can I have a look in your bag?" The other one asks, getting out of the car.

It's just a cop— it's just a cop, Tommy could take them in a fight. They all have body cams— *shit* he can't fight his way out of this one.

The officer walks around to Tommy and Tommy holds out his bag.

It feels like Tommy is about to die from how fast his heart is beating, he can barely focus on anything apart from his own heart beating as the officer looks inside the grocery bag. He prays that they can't see the hoodie or the boots or the goggles or anything.

After a moment too long the officer stops looking and Tommy puts the bag back over his shoulder.

"Where are you from, kid?"

"Logstedchire," Tommy replies, "Lived there my whole life."

The officer screws up his nose and Tommy tries not to let the resentment burn inside of him. Bastard— they're both fucking bastards. He tries to ignore how he feels suddenly cold from his anger and he nods.

"Not the best place to be livin'," the one in the car says, "With all the vigilantes running about, the gangs and the drugs."

Tommy has to physically bite on the inside of his cheek to stop himself from saying anything.

“Yeah,” he says and that hurts to say, like Logstedchire is some shit hole that he hates. It’s not — it’s his area, it’s where he grew up, it’s where he lives now. It’s where he’s met almost everyone that’s ever been important to him. He has to pretend he hates it all, the lights and when it’s Prime’s Day and the sunsets and sunrises because it’s on the edge of the island and they can see all of that. “It’s a bit of a shithole,” Tommy says with a shrug, “But it’s cheap.”

The officer still outside of the car nods, “Well, I’ll let you be on your way. Don’t get too lost — don’t want to be caught up in a vigilante fight do we.”

“No, officer,” Tommy says with a smile.

Tommy starts walking again, keeping his eyes straight forwards and trying to keep himself from being too mad. It doesn’t work very well because he can still feel the rage building up in him.

They drive off.

Tommy turns around, before popping open the petrol cap from his distance away and dumping about all of it on the ground.

Police officers stuck in Logstedchire... that’ll go *amazingly* for them.

Tommy manages to smile to himself as he walks off. Was it worth potentially being found out? Yes. Yes it was worth that and more.

“Stupid fuckheads,” Tommy mutters to himself, and he keeps walking.

It’s quiet, and Tommy can’t help but have his hands shake as he walks through the streets. He checks over his shoulder and he glances down every street he can because he’s on *edge* and he doesn’t want to deal with this—

He already passed two officers he doesn't want to have to deal with more, he deserves... frankly he deserves better than that.

Tommy's heart is in his throat as he slowly approaches the place of his home.

He decides walking the entire way home isn't smart, and instead he ducks into the first underground station that he can find.

The first one that shows up is thankfully going to Logstedchire. Thank *fuck*.

So he clambers on that train, hands shaking.

He doesn't feel well, that's the short of it, his hands are shaking and the lights are not helping him because they're dim and a gross colour. There's stains on the ground and Tommy is holding the shopping bag because he knows there are cameras and in this bag are things that could out him as Theseus.

The lights are dim and paint everything a sickly yellow, they flicker every time they go over a bump of some sort.

On the carriage there are only a few other people. An elderly woman who is knitting like her life depends on it, someone who seems a bit drunk and a teenager with pretty good eyeshadow and killer eyeliner.

Tommy's hands are shaking.

He can do this, just—

“Hi,” the teenager says, they can't be much older than Tommy.

“Hi?”

“You alright?”

Tommy nods.

“Right—” they do not sound convinced. “Well, the next stop is mine.”

“Okay?”

“It’s the Logstedchire stop,” they deadpan, “That’s where we all have to get off.”

“Oh,” Tommy says, “Yeah— yeah that’s, yup.”

They give him a small smile, before shaking their head. There’s fondness there, and Tommy thinks they have siblings for sure, or friends as good as siblings.

Eventually they get off the train and Tommy and the teenager— who’s name Tommy doesn’t know, walk together.

Then the teenager stops him, they give him an awkward smile, before holding out a glove.

A fingerless glove that’s supposed to be in his bag—

Tommy hides the panic on his face, instead he takes the glove with a nod.

“Police are checking bags,” they say, “I’ll go before you.”

“Are you gonna get arrested?”

They just smile, “Not my first time— doesn’t matter anyway, Theseus—”

Tommy looks at them, mouth slightly open.

“You saved my little brother once,” they say, “From a mugger, I think you might have saved his life.”

Tommy goes to respond but they walk away.

They walk up the stairs and straight towards the police.

Tommy takes a deep breath.

He just has to walk past when they’re busy.

“Ma’am,” they say— which of course they do, gender presuming pricks. “Could we please check your bag, it’s just policy at times like this.”

“What?” They say, “No fuckin’ way can you look in my bag, I don’t need police snooping around in my bag. Get a fucking warrant.”

“Ma’am—” Tommy might hit this person for this. “Ma’am, it’s just a routine check.”

“None of the other stations were doing this.”

Tommy hitches his bag over his shoulder.

“It’s just routine.”

“No,” they say, “Fuck you.”

“We’re going to have to take it by force—”

“I know my rights you can not do that, you need a warrant or a valid reason.”

“I’d say you’re showing suspicious activity,” the other one says and Tommy takes a deep breath.

He can do this.

He starts walking up the stairs, one of the officers look at him and the kind teenager appears to see where the officer is looking because they kick one of them in the shin before trying to run back down the stairs.

Both of them chase them.

Tommy turns around and looks down the stairs as the person— who doesn’t even know his name and they give him a short smile over their shoulder.

Then Tommy turns around and keeps walking.

The walk home is short.

He can't think of anything, but his heart is in his throat and everything hurts.

Eventually he manages to get to the stairs, he takes a few careful steps up the stairs and his legs are shaking.

He can do this.

Eventually with more effort than should be needed, he manages to get himself up the stairs.

That's alright—

That's okay, that's alright— he can do this.

With a few final steps, Tommy steps into the building— he closes the door behind him and locks it behind him. Purpled, Tubbo and Ranboo all have keys, anyone else doesn't matter at the moment.

The door doesn't lock properly—

Shit, the door doesn't lock properly—

Tommy grabs a chair and pushes it underneath the door handle, he's not sure if that actually works or only works in movies but he does it anyway. It's the only bit of control he has.

Clean up the injuries— that's the next thing he has to do. Clean the cuts and figure out how he's going to hide this because this is a big fuck up and Wilbur isn't stupid— well he might be, but other people aren't and Tommy can't do this—

Holy fuck he can't do this.

With shaky steps, and half using the wall to hold himself up he manages to lug himself into the bathroom. His legs are shaking so much.

With heavy steps he manages to get to the sink— okay, okay he can do this. Just wash some of the blood off and then he can look for a first aid kit and put bandaids over this or something.

He needs Purpled here— Purpled would know what to do—

Slow down, he needs to slow down. Take a deep breath. He takes a deep breath, it does nothing to calm his nerves. He can do this— just—

His head feels light again and Tommy closes his eyes.

He grabs onto the sink. He tries to steady himself, really he does.

His knuckles go white from the sheer force he's holding the sink with. He gasps for breath, and eventually forces himself to look at his own eyes in the mirror.

He sees his father's eyes staring back at him.

Tommy yells before stumbling back and knocking his legs against the back of the bath. His eyes are stuck on his own as he stares at them in the mirror.

His eyes are cold. They're unblinking and all of his worst memories are staring back at him. He can't rip his eyes away, he doesn't deserve to look away. Instead all he can do is stare at eyes that aren't really his.

No one's at home, Purpled and Ranboo are at work and Tubbo's probably at the library or—it doesn't matter. No one is here and Tommy is alone the way it's always been.

His eyes are cold—he hates them for that, they're blank and they're the same eyes that used to stare at him. Cold and unblinking and eyes that used to look down on him and hurt him and enjoy it. They're the same—the same cold blue eyes that haunt Tommy every time he sees his own reflection.

He manages to tear his eyes away, he stumbles back before sinking to the floor. His back leans against the side of the bath and his hands are pressed against the cool tile.

Everything hurts and his bones ache and he just doesn't want this—he doesn't want any of this.

Tommy grabs at his hair and he sits there for a moment, just breathing in and out heavily, so heavily that it almost hurts. Just in and out and in and out.

He can't do this, he can't do this—

Tommy tries to open his mouth to take a deep breath, to try and calm himself down, trying to do anything apart from the raw panic that's taking his entire body over.

He can't do this—he doesn't know how he can do this, he can't do this—he hurt his friends and he didn't hate it and it was *fun*. It was fun and he was laughing and smiling and enjoying seeing Wilbur looking as hurt as he felt.

Tommy's stomach lurches again and he manages to drag himself over to the toilet bowl, and what was not for the first—nor the last time, he throws up the remaining food he had. It was nothing, it was mostly bile and stomach acid and his throat burned at it, and then he gagged from the feel of it.

He can't do this—

The floor cracks underneath his feet and Tommy jumps at that, he falls backwards and scrambles away from it. His hands are shaking and he can't think— he can't think— he's going to hurt someone because he doesn't have control right now.

He can't do this— he can't calm himself down because everything's falling apart and Tommy can't do anything about it he can only sit here and—

The shower head falls off the shower, red sparks rip it away from the actual base of the shower and Tommy's hands are shaking so badly and he can't think apart from the horror the is invading his mind and— he can't think and he's breaking everything and what if this gets turned on him and then what.

His hands are shaking so badly.

He needs someone here but no one is here— and deep down maybe Tommy deserves that, the constant loneliness and the coming and going of people and the fact not one of them stay— he deserves that and he—

Before he can stop himself he chokes out a sob.

He needs someone here— everyone probably hates him, and if they don't they should he doesn't deserve that love and care that everyone thinks he does. He's not a good person— he's not a nice person and he can't fucking do this.

There's a noise and his phone comes crashing into the room, it flies across the floor and skids until it hits the sink.

His powers— do his fucking powers have opinions on his mental health now?

That almost manages to pull Tommy out of his panic and make him laugh because his *fucking powers* have decided that he needs to call someone.

His powers have never felt like exactly a part of him and this is—

Tommy actually laughs, he throws his head back and laughs and maybe this is it and he's lost his final marble because *holy fuck* does it feel that way. He laughs and holds his stomach because this really is funny.

His entire life is really very funny.

Just— everything that can go wrong does and Tommy laughs because how could he not? Everything always goes wrong, and it might be his fault and it might not but it's *so* fucking funny.

“Main character arc,” Tommy manages between his laughter.

Deo— that's a whole thing in itself. That one thing might be enough to make someone breakdown and cry together, getting thrown out by your own— father figure? Brother figure — he'd never really figured it out.

Then his parents and that whole shit is hilarious because *how* are people that bad and not thinking they're not and how does that fuck with his mind so much even to this day it was over ten years ago and it's not like they're gonna come back to haunt them because Tommy doesn't even know if there was a body—

And Wilbur— that's hilarious because of course they'd fuck this up enough that a version of themselves, not that dissimilar from the version they show each other hate each other and hurt each other because of course Tommy's life has ended up that way.

And somewhere between Tommy's laughter, there's tears streaming down his face, and the laughing becomes more like hiccupping sobs and then now he's crying so hard he can't think

about anything apart from how hard he's crying and—

It's not so funny anymore.

It never really was funny to begin with.

The cupboard door of the cabinet under the sink falls off. Hitting the ground with a large clatter before toppling over and hitting Tommy in the leg. It doesn't hurt and Tommy—

Tommy can't breathe again.

He needs to breathe, his logical smart brain, the one that rarely makes an appearance knows this. It knows this well, it knows that Tommy is panicking and he's hyperventilating and he needs to breathe, just in and out and in and out and he can do this— so why isn't the air entering his lungs doing anything? Why does every breath he draws in feel like something pulling on the bottom of his lungs and he feels light headed and he needs someone here because his powers are going to hurt him— or someone else who doesn't know and that's not fair.

Who can he call?

Who's going to get it— who's going to drop everything to run to him because Tommy doesn't deserve that treatment and he's sick of having people saying that they do because he doesn't and his parents must have been onto something because it was right—

His phone buzzes.

From it's spot on the floor underneath the counter, which now has a giant crack in it from where the edge of the cupboard door hit it. Tommy stares at it with wide eyes. It rings and moves around on the floor and Tommy just stares at it.

It's Techno's number.

His stupid contact picture— the one that was taken from basically under Techno's face and it's perhaps the worst angle of anyone ever and somehow Techno still looks deadpanned and tired and Tommy—

He picks it up.

"Tommy, what the fuck—"

And somehow Techno's voice gets him to break, straight away, more than he's already been breaking. It feels like a fracture in his chest that threatens to take and take and take until there's nothing left and Tommy's not sure what else is left—

He chokes out a sob.

"Techno," he says, "I— I know you're— I know you're mad at me and— and I'm— and I'm sorry but I need you right now and— I'm sorry that I need you right now— but I don't know what to do right now and my powers are going wild and breaking everything— and— I— and I'm so sorry but I need you and I hate that I need you because you don't deserve this and —"

"I'm there," Techno says and there's no hesitation— no nothing, there never is with him.
"I'm not mad, Tommy—"

"Should be," Tommy chokes out.

"I'm not."

And Tommy knows how to deal with anger— but this isn't anger, this is kindness and he doesn't know how he's supposed to deal with this—

“I’m not mad, Tommy... I’m never mad at you, you’re only you, you’re only a kid and I care about you too much to ever really be mad. I’m confused and I’m worried but I’m not mad.”

Tommy chokes out a sob into the phone, and great now he’s crying and blubbering and this is his own mess he can fucking lay in it. He doesn’t deserve this tantrum— he caused this, he did this. He did this and he doesn’t regret it.

He doesn’t regret it—

He’s not even aware of the tile on one of the wall scattering and the bits of ceramic that spray over him. Vaguely he’s aware that there’s some sort of— shit on him, but he doesn’t care anymore about what it is.

Tommy sobs, and Techno can only listen.

But he’s being heard— he’s being heard by someone who cares and knows how much he’s hurting and— Prime he’s hurting.

“Tommy,” Techno says through the phone and Tommy stops everything he’s doing. He goes silent and he hates how that’s a reaction in him. *“I need you to breathe— it sounds like you’re going to pass out.”*

“Feels— feels like it—” Tommy’s head is spinning and he can’t breathe— he can’t fucking breathe, the air in his lungs isn’t inflating it. It’s not working and he feels unwell and he needs Techno here now—

He can’t breathe, he can’t breathe—

—when Tommy was about fifteen— not that long ago— he ran into mugger, and this mugger, he kinda sucked. Tommy tried to be all polite about it, he couldn’t speak as he was

Theseus but he tried. Instead he got pinned against the wall and choked and he couldn't breathe— or think and there was nothing in his mind but panic—

This is much the same.

It's just panic, all throughout his body. Nothing but panic— he can't hear Techno speaking and even if he could he doesn't care because *holy shit, he's going to die* and the logically part of his brain knows this isn't true and it never has been true.

But the little fucker at the back of his brain doesn't, and he's panting for breath that won't come— and his chest hurts and he wants to cry but he can't do any of these things because he can't breathe.

He can't hear Techno— or anything apart from his laboured breathing and blood rushing around his ears. He can't hear Techno— Techno's there and Tommy needs to calm down but he can't—

He can't fucking breathe—

It's like when he was a kid and Theseus and now, now, because he can't breathe and everything is going wrong and he can't do anything about it and he's a terrible person and he misses Deo and he wants to go back to when everything was simple—

He chokes on his own air.

There's something welcoming about the way his vision is filled with dots and he knows that just for a moment he can stop— there might be something concerning about that but he doesn't care—

He welcomes the way the floor flies up to his face, and then how he doesn't remember anymore.

As the way that it always goes when he passes out, he wakes up eventually.

This time it's to... well it sounds like someone is trying to break down his door. Tommy makes a small noise in the back of his chest because *oh shit* the police are here or the heroes and Techno told everyone and—

“Tommy!” The person yells, it's Techno. “Tommy let me in right now or I will break down this door.”

There's another thump on the door, and Tommy knows Techno could break down that door without barely lifting a finger. But he doesn't want to explain this damage to his landlord because he manages to find his voice.

“Tech—” Tommy says because it's all he can say.

“Oh thank Prime,” Techno whispers, and Tommy can hear the relief, “Tommy, can you please let me in?”

“Yeah— yeah,” Tommy stumbles off the ground and almost falls again because his legs are tired and he can't think because everything is going wrong— but Techno is here and that's what really counts.

Techno is here.

He can do this— whatever this is, he can figure it out because Techno is here because he wants to be here and Tommy slaps his hand over his mouth to stop himself from sobbing again.

With more effort than it probably should take, Tommy manages to get himself to the door and drag away the door. He opens slowly and looks at Techno, standing directly across from him.

Techno looks like a bit of a mess, his hair is not in a state that most would deem to be moderately acceptable and he's wearing pink doughnut pajamas with a blue shirt that has Wilbur's face shittily drawn on in permanent marker. Techno's eyes are also a bit red around the edges and it looks like he's ran here.

"Hi," Tommy manages, somehow keeping his tears in check.

Techno just looks at him, a gentle expression on his face— like Tommy is breaking something in his heart. "Kid," and it's said with so much *care* that Tommy can barely comprehend it. "You— you look awful."

Tommy nods, "Feel awful."

Techno looks at him for a moment longer, not saying anything in particular, just staring at his brother and apparently just accepting it. Tommy reaches up and rubs at his eyes— he can't cry— not again, it's too much vulnerability.

"What happened?" Techno asks gently.

Tommy grabs him by the wrist before dragging him inside. He closes the door behind them, then sets the chair underneath the door handle again— still doesn't know if that works but it's worth a shot for sure.

"Hi—" Tommy whispers, leaning against the door.

Techno's standing in the kitchen a bit awkwardly, but Tommy's also standing here awkwardly.

"Are you hurt?" Techno presses.

Tommy shakes his head. “Apart from some bruises and small cuts— my ankle hurts a bit but that’s—”

“We’ll get some ice,” Techno says and starts going through the freezer as Tommy just stands there. Leaning against the door, and over the chair in a way that is not comfortable even in the slightest.

Techno manages to find an ice pack he deems suitable and wraps a dish cloth around it a few times before looking at Tommy.

“Shouldn’t be standing on it, kid.”

“I know,” his voice is strained and they both know it. “I should sit down.”

He doesn’t move.

Techno’s eyes soften even more. “Would you like a hand?”

“I’d— I’d kinda just like to stand here, if that’s okay?” His voice is on the verge of tears, he’s on the verge of tears. There’s what feels like a headache building up behind his eyes and it fucking hurts. No one ever told him how painful trying not to cry is— he’d almost forgotten.

Techno doesn’t give that a response, instead moving so he’s leaning against one of the counters closer to where Tommy is standing. Techno’s shoulder is close enough to brush the wall that the door’s connected to.

He’s glad Techno’s here— but if Tommy moves he thinks that’s it for him.

He thinks that is genuinely what makes him explode into a million tiny little pieces and he— he doesn’t know *what* to do with that, he doesn’t know what he can do with that because he just wants to start sobbing.

“I think we should get you off that ankle, kid—”

“The tower still has blue,” is what Tommy starts with. “They— Elysium showed me it. I wasn’t going to help them— really I never was, I knew it would cause more trouble and drama and hurt more people and I just... stared at it and knew I had to.”

“They had blue?” Techno whispers, the ice pack has gone slack in his hand.

Tommy nods. “Remember the power suppressing handcuffs— that Sam made?”

Techno nods, because they both remember— of course they do.

“I didn’t think about it at the time, but Sam said that he’d reverse engineered blue. You need formulas and samples and all sorta shit to reverse engineer something— anything and he did and—”

With a deep breath, Tommy sighs.

“And I didn’t wanna help them,” Tommy adds quickly because he needs Techno to stop looking at him like that. “But— I had to. I— I couldn’t live with myself knowing that... the instructions on how to make this— this life altering, ruining— whatever you want to call it, drug. And it’s there. In that tower, in a place that covered up the death of a superhero to better the bottom line and their reputation.”

Techno looks like his world is coming apart at the seams.

“They— have... blue. In the tower?” Techno repeats breathlessly. “And— the instructions basically, on how to make more. They have that— and they’ve been using it? All these years?”

“Blue originated from the heroes,” Tommy mutters darkly. “Then— uh, Wilbur showed up. And I was just...” he runs a hand through his hair and ignores that *finally* the tears are starting to slip. “He was on patrol with Fundy, y’know and—”

Techno looks at him, there’s no judgement, just a gentle acceptance of Tommy, and whatever he’s about to say.

“And I got— so angry,” Tommy says slowly. The words hurt in his mouth. “I got *so* angry, and I wanted to... make Spectre— Wilbur, whatever, hurt. And I wanted to make sure I did that, and that it stung— and— I didn’t mean to do the mind thing—”

“What.”

Tommy’s heart drops to his stomach.

It feels like his blood stops pumping and instead is replaced with ice.

“I—”

“What do you mean?” Techno’s voice is calm— too calm. “What did you do?”

“I didn’t mean to!” Tommy yells, quickest to anger, quickest to yell and fight because it might be all he knows. “I never mean to! I didn’t— he grabbed my mask! He didn’t fuckin’ pull it off my face or anything but he had a grip and I panicked and I didn’t know I could even do that while panicking because—”

Techno stares at him. “Did he say anything?”

“Wilbur?”

“Yeah.”

Tommy nods slowly, “He— he— fell backwards, like... I dunno, I stumbled around and called out for someone called Eret—”

Techno stares at him. “Oh holy Prime,” he mutters and Tommy just stares at him. “He called for Eret?”

Tommy nods wordlessly.

“Shit,” Techno says, “Fucking hell— Tommy do you know what—”

“I didn’t mean to!” Tommy yells and Techno doesn’t flinch away. “I never— I don’t want to hurt him like that— I don’t want to fuck with his mind, I just wanted to punch him in the nose or something! I never *meant to* .”

Techno takes a deep breath, before apparently needing a break and he walks around the living room slowly. Breathing in and out slowly like he might just explode. “And what did Fundy have to do with this?”

“I’m a terrible person and Wilbur would do anything to save him—”

That makes Techno pause in his tracks, turning around straight away and looking at Tommy. It’s not disgust— but it’s something there, “Tommy, that’s how supervillains talk! You’re going to start talking about the greater good—”

“The greater good,” Tommy repeats, not meeting Techno’s eyes. “Is that the tower doesn’t have blue anymore. We don’t think anyone else can make it anymore— not the way it was.”

Techno stares at him. “Tommy— you— you hurt someone, on purpose.”

“Yeah.”

He's not going to cry— not now.

“Tommy...” Techno says, “I think you enjoyed it.”

“I did.” Tommy confesses, his voice has dropped to barely above a whisper. The words hurt... they hurt a lot. “I did... I can't even lie about it— I did. I was glad to see Wilbur hurting and scared because I was hurt and scared and I never got any sorta— anything on that. I started using it as a fucking joke!” Tommy is yelling again. “And no one who knew, not you, not Purpled— thought to grab me and be like ‘ *hey are you okay* ’ about this entire thing because no one talked to me about it— and I'm scared of heights and Wilbur sometimes because of that and I want— I need— I don't know, but I need Wilbur to understand.”

“Tell him you're Theseus then.”

“I tried!” Tommy runs his hands through his hair. “I'm trying— I want to, I've never wanted anything so badly and I want him to know but I want him to stay my brother and I care about him and I wish I didn't—”

“Do you?”

“Huh?”

“Do you care about Wilbur?”

“Of course.”

Techno pauses for a second, and he just... looks through Tommy. Like he's barely even there. “Do you care about Spectre?”

“Well— kinda.”

“They’re the same person.”

“But they’re not! Wilbur cares about me— Spectre doesn’t, why can’t I have that separation in my head? They’re different people to me, Wilbur is gentle and he cares and he cuts hashbrowns in half and scoops out the insides before eating them— and Spectre hurts me, and he hunts down my friends and me and he—”

Techno stares at him. “You’re going down a bad path,” he says carefully, “And I will not let this happen. Not now, not ever.”

“Oh, yeah?” Tommy snaps, “What kinda path is that?”

“One that ends up with you thinking killing the president is a good idea!” Techno yells.

Tommy closes his mouth.

“One that ends up with you fighting in gang wars because you’re fucking good at it. One that ends with you being interrogated for— Prime knows how many hours because you’re a vigilante and they want to know all your connections. One where you are stuck in a job you hate— that hurts more than it helps *anyone* and you’re the only one who can see that.”

Tommy stares.

How could he not?

Techno takes a deep breath and murmurs something under his breath, maybe to Chat, Tommy’s not sure. “I’m not letting you repeat my mistakes.”

“I don’t think they were mistakes,” Tommy raises his head and looks Techno in the eyes—

He looks so tired.

Techno just... looks exhausted.

“And I thought that too, at the time,” Techno says easily. “Trust me— I thought that, I didn’t care. I didn’t care because I made a difference at the time, the president quit and a new guy took his place and I thought he’d be better and he wasn’t— and that was all for nothing and I just lost my freedom.”

“Well I’m glad one of us got our freedom for a bit because—”

“No.” Techno says, “I don’t care what you say to me right now Thomas Underscore. You can start throwing things for all I care, start yelling at me— I don’t care. This is dangerous— you’re making dangerous decisions and I am not watching my little brother go down the path I did.”

“And how are you gonna stop me from being dangerous— being a threat to Wilbur.”

“That’s not what I said.”

“You fucking implied it!” Tommy yells back at him.

“I didn’t mean to then,” Techno replies, easily— and Tommy hates that Techno's calm because Tommy needs to yell and it’s shitty of him to do that when the other person is calm. “You’re not dangerous, never have been, but you’re making some choices and decisions that I think could lead you into something you don’t want to be in.”

Tommy stares at him, “You don’t get to dictate how I live.”

“Uh— no but I think I should have some say in whether you get yourself arrested or not.”

“Does it matter?” Tommy whispers, and Techno looks at him. “I’ll— I’ll get caught one day anyway? It’s— I can’t run forever, you didn’t run forever and most people say you were one of Logstedchire’s best.”

Techno doesn’t say anything.

Tommy takes a deep breath but it feels like there’s nothing steadying about it, instead he’s shaking and he’s scared and— he’s so sick of being scared.

“Yeah,” Tommy says, “I’m gonna get caught and it might as well be sooner rather than later.”

"Tommy—"

"It's a matter of time," Tommy keeps his vision on his shoes to keep himself from crying. "And like— I'm cool with that I think, I'm stressed for Purpled and Tubbo and Ranboo but I think you'll keep them safe so—"

"Tommy..."

"And like being a hero isn't amazing I know that but I can do it and I'd be fucking good at it and—"

Techno looks at him, so incredibly sadly. "Tommy— please don't give up this easily."

"Well I tried fighting!" Tommy yells and he's fully aware of the tears rolling down his face. "For so long, and it just ends up hurting more people and I'll hurt more and more people and I don't want to hurt anymore people but I have to fight right— don't give up don't let down your guard don't—"

He wipes at his eyes, it does nothing to hide his tears.

"And if I got caught I realised I wouldn't have cared like at all— so what, who cares? It's only me and I deserve it, I've hurt so many people and I'm a bad person and—"

"Toms—" Techno takes a few steps towards him and Tommy looks up at him, his lip is wobbling and there are tears in his eyes.

He basically throws himself at Techno, and Techno wraps his arms around him. It's one of the best hugs he's had in a while—

And so Tommy cries.

He cries a lot and it's messy and if this was a coming of age film he would not be crying this cleanly. Instead there's snot and hiccuping sobs.

Techno just holds him, his grip doesn't relent and Tommy just— lets it all out.

"I can't do this anymore— I'm sick of being scared, I don't wanna be scared anymore. I don't — I don't wanna be scared— please I want it to stop."

Eventually, Tommy's legs give out on him and he's basically in Techno's grip and he lowers both of them to the floor.

"I can't— I can't do this— I want my parents or Tubbo, can't it go back to normal— I want it to be normal. Why isn't it normal?"

And Techno just hugs him, Tommy sits on the kitchen floor and cries, and Techno just holds him.

He doesn't react when Tommy gets tears on his shitty print-out shirt of Wilbur or snot—

"You're okay kid," Techno says. "You're alright I got you."

“It’s not alright— it’s not— I dunno what to—”

“We’ll figure it out, we’ll figure it out— we’ll figure it out Tommy. I promise you, we’ll figure this out.”

And Techno just hugs him.

Tommy cries, and falls apart a little and Techno’s here—

He’s here.

And both of them wish that was enough.

Chapter End Notes

Today's meme is brought to you by Aster, a summary of the bedrockbros argument:



Chapter Summary: (this is a more plotty chapter so here!)

- Due to a deal Tommy made with Purpled to get him go to the barbeque that means Theseus has to go on patrol tonight
 - That goes rather well! Until there's an Elysium attack at the tower and they're currently trying to escape. Tommy, curious about why and wanting to get into the heroes' good books, shows up to where they are.
 - Tommy fights Elysium for a bit, Hannah and Nestor are there
 - Police show up and all of them run inside the building which gets shot through and Tommy does some badassery.
 - He fights literally all of the police. Which goes great until Spectre shows up, Tommy's powers are faltering and shit because Wilbur's there and they fight (Fundy is also there.)
 - Wilbur reaches for his mask, Tommy panics and does a bit of mind fuckery on Wilbur Soot, who calls out for Eret (WHO HAS NOT YET BEEN MENTIONED IN THE MAIN FIC)
 - Eventually after some more fighting Tommy backs off and goes home. He sees someone who he believes could be the leader of Elysium before hiding with some Logstedchire residents. Sees the police on his way back who question this teenager who vaguely matches Theseus's description. They suck tho.
 - Tommy gets home, has a breakdown. It's a whole thing.
 - He remembers last chapter where Techno was like "we care about you" and because he's scared of himself and what he can do (powers might explode) he calls Techno and he shows up
 - They have a small argument because Techno is stressed that Tommy will repeat the same mistakes that Techno made when he was Tommy's age
 - And the chapter ends with Tommy sitting on the floor as Techno hugs him because that's all he can do.
-

ART FINGS! Due to character limits I could only do one art piece per person and I think I missed some so I'm really sorry about that /gen

Blue drew [tina!tommy](#) and he's such a lil' guy /pos

Mango keeps drawing [tinaaos!wilbur hot](#) and it's a 10/10

ROZY DREW [TINAAOS!DREAM](#) AND LIKE *DAMN YOU GUYS*

Danny drew [tinaaos!wilbur devouring a hashbrown](#) (like a chad)

GUYS LOOK [TINA!SCAR](#) DRAWN BY THE BELOVED NIKI

Birdinabox drew [tinaaos!phil having a crisis over pistachio ice cream \(if i remember correctly\)](#)

[#STOPDRAWINGTINAAOSWILBUR HOT](#) LIKE LOOK AT THIS /pos

TEAGAR DREW [TINAAOS!WILBUR HOT](#) AND LIKE *GUYS PLEASE*

Potat drew these [super cool scenes](#) from the recent More Acts chapter

FINN DREW [TOMMY HAVING A CRISIS](#) AND I LOVE IT

And [MORE ATTRACTIVE WILBUR](#) LIKE GUYS, this one by finch!

Also Tomato drew this [STUNNING picture of the landscape and Tommy](#) and I am LOSING IT /pos

Hi guys! I'm havin' a little break from TINAAOS while I work on:

- a.) fic fight (so lots of one-shots basically)
- b.) another long fic (IT'S A SPACE AU!)
- c.) finishing some other projects

So yeah! I'll be busy doing hot girl shit!

Also I really don't wanna write next chapter because it's sad so I'm putting that off

TY FOR READING SEE YOU NEXT TIME

That Feeling When You Almost Get Arrested for Being the Wrong Vigilante

Chapter Summary

“Daniel Greyson, you are under arrest for suspected vigilantism, anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law—”

“Don’t say the Miranda rights in L’Manberg— we have a different thing,” Purpled mutters, “Fuckin’ American transfers.”

His head gets pushed against the concrete even more for that statement, and Purpled grits his teeth to stop himself from crying out. He is not giving these fuckers any sort of gratification.

or, things could go better (but they 100% could go worse)

Chapter Notes

Hi! Welcome back to to hell TINAAOS!

I would like to give a huge shout-out to [Eris](#) (aka SoulfirePhoenix) for helping me with the political speeches and general vibes found in this chapter. They’re the author of [Welcome Home Theseus](#) which is an amazing read and deals with so many complex topics very well. Also, it’s a fic where Mumza doesn’t die and Niki is a complete badass!

The connecting sections are wonky, the pacing is weird. But I really like this chapter! So enjoy!!!

Warnings: mentions of guns & death, some light mind-limboing mentions, mentions of drugs, (if you’ve gotten this far I think all of these topics are covered more light-heartedly than in some other chapters)

The police also HIGHKEY suck here and we’re now delving into a lot of systematic classism and political shit which can be pretty triggering for a lot of people. So please be careful!

Purpled isn't scared of a lot of things, apart from lots of things. He doesn't like blood, he doesn't like the silence that much, he's not overly fond of heights or loud noises and he sure as fuck does not like blood—

Yeah, he really doesn't like blood, one time he passes out when looking at his own blood. It was a stab wound— and he thinks Punz fixed that, he doesn't really remember though, because he was passed out in some alley...

He still doesn't know if it was Punz or some kind person who Purpled dreamed looked like Punz... or wished.

Still, he knows fear, normally all his bones lock up and he can't breathe, he panics for a moment too long— that moment too long often gets him hurt.

It was a nice night.

Quackity, Sapnap, Foolish, Sam and Fundy were all there, Karl came later with Mexican food for all of them to eat, and Purpled kept crushing them at Uno. It was amazing and he was laughing maybe the brightest he'd laughed in a long time.

A highlight was Sam having to pick up twenty-two cards, because Quackity, the heathen plays in a way that allowed you to put +2s on +4s which does make for a funnier game now Purpled thinks about it.

It's a good night, he annoys Fundy and Sapnap flips him off more than he doesn't, and Purpled brings that energy right back.

"You bastard!" Sapnap yells when he lands on Purpled's property in Monopoly. "You planned that!"

"Sapnap—" Quackity says softly, "You rolled the die—"

“He planned it,” Sapnap points an accusatory finger at Purpled, “Maybe your power is probability manipulation Daniel Greyson—”

Purpled sighs, “I don’t have a power, Sapnap—”

“That’s what you *want us to think*, ” Sapnap hands over the money before crossing his arms and sitting down on the couch again.

Foolish raises his hand.

“Yes, Foolish,” Sam says, keeping a false polite tone. He knows it’s fake because Purpled heard him cuss Quackity out for about three minutes when he read that Sam owed the bank two hundred dollars.

“Can Daniel give me four hundred dollars?”

“Why?”

“I want four hundred dollars.”

Quackity looks at Purpled, pulling a face.

Purpled reaches into his wallet, before dropping four hundred-dollar bills on the coffee table.

“Why do you—” Fundy blinks at him, “Why do you— have that much cash on hand?”

Now the answer is because Purpled is paranoid and doesn’t trust bank accounts, and he has at least a couple hundred on him at all times, and funnily enough, he tends to have the exact amount of money needed to get two people out of L’Manberg—

He tries not to think about that too much.

Sapnap's phone buzzes, and he squints at it for a moment, before bringing it up to his ear. He looks at everyone in the room, eyes drifting between Fundy, Sam, Foolish and Quackity. All of them shrug—

Well, no one knows what's going on.

Purpled grabs his phone, opening Twitter because he hates himself.

1. ● Superheroes ● Trending

#elysium

43.2k Tweets

2. ● Superheroes ● Trending

THESEUS????

21.3k Tweets

Purpled stares at his phone for a few moments— huh—

“Turn on the TV,” Sapnap says, his tone dangerously low.

This makes Karl scramble for the remote and turns on the TV, Purpled whips around so he's staring at the TV which has remained silent this entire time.

On the news, it's a helicopter whirling around.

Purpled looks at it, squinting a little. What... the fuck is happening?

What he can see is a shot of a library down in Central L'Manberg. The one that was on the border of lower L'Manberg and Central L'Manberg and Purpled stares at it for a long moment, trying to figure out whatever the fuck is happening.

"They took shit from the tower," Quackity says, looking up from his phone. "We've all been sent a message about it— it's a high priority to get it back, apparently— Sapnap we might get called in—"

Then Tommy shows up. Standing with several... on-fire books around them that he doesn't want to think about too hard. Then the chaos breaks out.

Purpled can't remember much about the actual fight, because he's too busy trying to mask his reactions and too busy trying to assess the injuries Tommy might have through a shaky camera.

Then Tommy stops moving.

Like he's been shot.

Tommy stumbles back slightly, before reaching out a hand and collapsing onto the floor.

Tommy's been shot—

He's not getting back up.

Tommy always gets back up— it's like half of his personality.

What was the last thing Purpled said to Tommy—

He can't even remember.

Tommy might be dead or unmasked and Purpled can't even fucking remember the last thing that he said to his best friend, he can't— he can't remember and he might not ever see Tommy ever again—

But he's in a room, surrounded by heroes and a reporter.

He keeps his face as blank as he can and watches the video.

His best friend is dead— or dying and Purpled is just watching it on the TV and he can't do anything and was breathing all this hard?

“Daniel?” Karl asks and Purpled manages to tear his eyes from the TV, “Are you alright—”

“We just watched... someone get shot—”

Then Theseus moves, he slams one of his hands into the ground and Purpled can breathe again.

He's alive, holy fuck— he's alive.

For now, Purpled is going to *kill* that bastard. He's going to murder him, tear him apart limb from limb for scaring him like that.

“Daniel?” Sam says and Purpled looks up at him, nodding slightly. His throat feels clogged up.

“Huh— yeah what?” Purpled says.

“They’re going to lockdown Logstedchire,” Sam says softly, looking at Purpled, if Purpled was trying to notice it then maybe he’d see the understanding in his eyes. But Purpled is panicking and he doesn’t see much of anything. “They’re gonna lock down Logstedchire—you need to get home.”

“Huh?” Purpled whispers.

He’s supposed to know how to conceal his emotions— why can’t he conceal these? He knows how to do this, so why is his heart beating so fast in his chest— he can’t— can’t focus because Tommy’s hurt and he fucked it all up and Purpled’s mad and he’s upset and he’s just *scared*.

“You gotta get home,” Sam says again, his voice steady, “They’ll lock down the district to look for Theseus, I can take you if you want, you match Theseus’s description perhaps the most, you’re going to need me with you—”

“Okay,” Purpled glances back at the TV, his heart in his throat. His hands are shaking and he feels like he might just fucking throw up all on the floor. Which like... isn’t the ideal plan if he’s being completely honest. “Yeah— I— I wanna go home.”

Sam’s face softens slightly and he nods, looking around at the rest of the room. “Take care guys.”

Purpled didn’t say his goodbyes as he was led down the stairs, he just stared ahead, heart beating so fast it felt impossible. Tommy was okay... he was always okay, well not okay—but he always scraped through. That was just something Tommy did, he always survived and he always bounced back— for better or for worse.

Everything was okay.

It had to be okay.

Purpled doesn't know what he can do if it isn't.

Sam's car is... a car? Purpled knows jack shit about cars and he's not going to pretend he does. It's a car and it looks newish, it's clean as well which are always highlights. He sits in the front next to Sam.

His hands don't shake, he puts them on the dash and starts tapping trying to relieve some of the energy currently building up in his fucking body. It's terrible.

"You okay?" Sam says, "It can be hard to see— well anyone get hurt, even if you don't know them."

Purpled nods, not trusting himself to not spill all of Tommy's secrets. He taps his hand against the dash again, closing his eyes and leaning back in his seat.

It's okay. He's okay. It's okay— Tommy is fine, everything is fine. It's fine. Everything is okay and there's nothing else that implies otherwise. Purpled tries to breathe and it feels harder than usual, his chest hurts and his hands feel numb and—

For fuck's sake he has to get it together.

He's not like Tommy who can afford to have frequent panic attacks, someone needs to keep some of their brain cells together so he can like... make sure they don't die. He needs to calm the fuck down—

Purpled's not even hurt, he's being an overdramatic little bitch—

Sam glances at Purpled, before looking back on the road. "Are you sure you're alright?"

"Fine," he says through gritted teeth. "Just get me home."

Sam doesn't say anything for a long moment after that, and Purpled is allowed to get lost in his own thoughts again. He crosses his arms and stares out the window as they drive past lights and sirens and dammit—

It's okay. It's fine. Everything is fine.

He's fine. Great. Dandy even.

Near the official Logstedchire district separation. Which is... well just a big sign on most of the big entrances there's a bunch of officers standing and Purpled looks at Sam. There are rows and rows of traffic all trying to get through whatever checkpoint is happening.

Sam's eyes go wide for a moment. "That's not good."

"Huh?"

"Do you have an ID on you?"

Purpled reaches into his pocket, that's a great question— he doesn't normally bring his licence. He can't even officially drive, but he has a learner's licence, just so he can have that form of ID.

Sure enough, and luckily enough he has it.

Daniel Greyson.

Daniel Greyson is twenty years old and has had a license since he was sixteen, his birthday is April 1st, and there are also enough records for him to conceivably believe that he is a person rather than a fake identity Purpled has had for so long that he thinks of this as his real identity anyway.

But what a shit name— fucking *Daniel*. No, he works with people named... Phil, Thomas, Wilbur, Sam, George— like they really looked at the most boring names in the world and decided on those ones.

Sure, Purpled doesn't know his parents' names, despite the endless looking, but maybe they're called like... Karen and Steve. Honestly, would explain a bit about Purpled.

They eventually slow down in the traffic and Purpled glances at Sam nervously, Sam has his eyes set on the road. "What's happening?"

"Locking down Logstedchire," Sam keeps his voice even, and not even Purpled can get anything out of the tone in his voice. He seems... not upset, that's too strong of a word, but Purpled's not sure what he is. "They'll make everyone show ID."

"What does that prove?"

"Power game," Sam mutters, and his hands grab the steering wheel. "Just— when they ask show, don't try anything clever. Now is not the time, they've probably brought in people who are literally trained in being— assholes."

"Huh?"

"Special units," Sam mutters, "They get trained in the hero tower... it's not... nice."

“What the fuck does that mean?”

“They’re trained in riot control, subduing citizens, the legal loopholes that the average person doesn’t know. Interrogation.”

Purpled stares at the swaths of traffic in front of them.

This has been planned for a while.

They just— had no reason until now. No reason that the upper districts wouldn’t help fight it, and now... it feels like Logstedchire is on its own against its own country. It’s being patrolled — it’s being locked down.

It’s only going to get worse from here.

Purpled looks at Sam, opening his mouth. “Sam?” His voice sounds smaller than he’d like it, he sounds like a teenager rather than the adult he’s pretending to be. “Will it be okay?”

Sam looks at Purpled, just a quick glance but it’s long enough that something heavy settles in the car.

“I don’t know,” Sam says carefully.

And Purpled... well he doesn’t know what he can think about this. Apart from one of the few people he kinda looks up to said he doesn’t know if this will turn out okay.

Purpled nods and looks out the window again.

“It will,” Sam says slowly, looking at Purpled again, and Purpled refuses to look at him again. “I’m just... not sure how long it will take, for everything to be okay again. If this is going to start a decades-long pattern— everything works out in the end, it’s getting to the end that’s the difficult bit.”

“It’s not going to stop anything,” Purpled says absent-mindedly. “Nothing’s gonna change— Elysium will fight harder, the vigilantes will fight harder. They’ve given everyone a reason to fight.”

Sam smiles at that, tapping his fingers on the steering wheel.

“I mean, Logsted ain’t gonna give up easily,” Sam says, his Logstedchire accent seeping through and that makes Purpled smile. “We haven’t before. Why would we again?”

And that makes Purpled smile, not beam, he doesn’t do bright beaming smiles anymore but it’s a small thing that is easily missed. He rolls his eyes and they inch forwards a bit in the car.

Honestly, it’s kinda peaceful.

Sitting in a car that isn’t moving as the rain slams on the windows around them and the music plays quietly.

They roll ahead in the cars and generally there’s a sort of peace in it, Sam taps his fingers against the dashboard. There’s a sort of silence that surrounds them and Purpled lets himself relax into it.

Then a rap on their window.

Purpled in complete honesty, jumps, Sam gives him a sharp look before rolling down the window on Purpled’s side. Then after a few seconds he rolls down his own window too.

Right...

Okay?

Purpled looks at the person who might actually arrest him. Purpled can't see much about their face, they're wearing a black helmet that covers their entire head and a visor over their eyes. It's tinted black and with the darkness outside Purpled can't make out any defining features.

Right. A couple of red flags here—

“Hello,” Sam says cheerfully.

Purpled can feel their gaze on him.

Oh.

Oh this is not great.

Purpled glances at Sam, who seems to be remarkably calm.

“ID?” The one on Purpled's side asks.

And in truth— Purpled has been trained to be able to respond when being shot at. It's his whole thing, he stays calm under pressure. He panics for only a few seconds, before reaching for his ID in his back pocket.

He knows he took too long.

“Sir,” one of them says, “Can you open the door?”

“What, no?” Purpled says.

So instead of that, the door is yanked open and Purpled feels his stomach drop. Oh. Okay, this isn’t— how this was supposed to go. He tries to yank his arm away, but the guard manages to regain their grip quickly.

How were these fucks changed—

He tries to shoot a look back to Sam, but doesn’t succeed.

One of the officers grabs Purpled by the arm and Purpled opens his mouth to protest, to shake his arm free or to do anything. He manages to find his wording.

“Hey, what the fuck—”

Purpled’s legs are knocked out from underneath him, he hits the ground almost face first. He jerks his head to the side and braces. He hits with a thump and *fuck* that’s gonna leave a bruise or two.

His ID and wallet lands on the ground and Purpled feels his face get pushed against the wet concrete.

“Hey!” Sam yells.

Purpled resists the urge to say something under his breath, he doesn’t because he’s simply built that different.

The entire side of his face hurts.

Fuckin' ouch.

A hand pushed down on the back of his head, which shockingly enough, also hurt.

Purpled's cheek was pressed against the ground and the hand on the side of his head pushed down even more. He winces slightly and tries to fight slightly against the grip.

He loses the battle.

At least arrest me for being the right vigilante. Is what he doesn't say despite trying to open his mouth.

"Daniel Greyson, you are under arrest for suspected vigilantism, anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law—"

"Don't say the Miranda rights in L'Manberg— we have a different thing," Purpled mutters, "Fuckin' American transfers."

His head gets pushed against the concrete even more for that statement, and Purpled grits his teeth to stop himself from crying out. He is not giving these *fuckers* any sort of gratification.

"You have failed to produce any significant evidence that we have no reason to detain you, at least for a short time," one of the others say.

Is Purpled about to genuinely get arrested for being Theseus—

The fucking disrespect.

Purpled opens his mouth to announce that he is Purpled, one of the Logstedchire four, even if they should probably start calling it the Logstedchire three because Slime has fucked off—and *not* Theseus and they should put more respect on his name.

Fucking, Theseus!

No. He isn't going to be named after some little bitch who gets pushed off a cliff— and he's not going to be arrested because he's Theseus.

He gets hauled back onto his feet and his arm is twisted uncomfortably, his grits his teeth through the pain. Prime's sake, he's handled much worse— why is he such a little bitch now?

Purpled sighs.

He's about to get arrested for—

Being Theseus.

He probably has his Purpled gear in his bag— can they like at least search that and get the right answer. Prime, he is not letting himself get arrested for being Theseus.

Purpled opens his mouth to tell them to at least search through his bag which is on the car floor in the passenger side.

Instead he gets shoved towards a cop car.

Wow, this is really escalating quickly.

Purpled could take these guards down, he could kick one of them in the knee and he could elbow the other in the nose. There's a gun somewhere in his bag, he could get there before he was grabbed again—

He doesn't have to be trapped here.

But... for once in his life Purpled understands that he might need to back down from a fight. He won't win against these guys, not in the long run, it's a one-way ticket to making himself a criminal and also suspected of being Theseus.

The cop car door opens.

Wow. He is really—

Cool.

There are footsteps across from him and Purpled's only partially aware of Sam getting out of the car as people yell at him.

Sam yells something back that Purpled can't be bothered to tune into because the side of his face is hurting the most it ever has, and that's not something that's overly easy to do.

He glances in one of the side-view mirror. He can't see much but one side of his face is not looking amazing. And— honestly he looks a bit like a wet cat.

“My name is Sam Warren,” Sam says remarkably calm, “I’m a hero and therefore outrank you, and I’m telling you that if you don’t let Daniel up off the ground then you’re going to have to deal with lawsuit after lawsuit.”

Purpled does not have the money to do a lawsuit.

But the sentiment is amusing enough.

“Show us your registration.” One of them say, and Sam must do so, because the grip on the back of Purpled’s head lessens slightly. “And you’d be willing to be Daniel’s alibi?”

“He was with several people all night,” Sam keeps his voice frighteningly calm and Purpled thinks he hates that a little bit— how the fuck is he so calm when Purpled’s freedom is kinda on the line? “The live news was also playing when Theseus was on the screen— and Daniel was watching it.”

There’s a streetlight behind his head.

Guardian angel and all that shit Purpled’s never believed in.

After a long moment of hesitation and people looking over Sam’s registration as a hero, Sam keeps himself remarkably calm, but Purpled can see the rage simmering below there. He—he is not happy.

Eventually Purpled is shoved back in Sam’s direction.

He catches himself, and when Sam tries to help him pick up his wallet and ID he swats at Sam.

Sam doesn’t say anything for a moment, just looking at Purpled, before grabbing him around the shoulders and leading him back to the car.

They both get in and close the doors.

The car starts.

Purpled pulls down the mirror, there's a small cut on his eyebrow, probably from being pushed into a small, sharp pebble or something. But that one doesn't hurt at all, what does hurt is the mottled red mark on his cheek that does not look comfortable or healthy in any way.

It fucking hurts—

They're both dead silent until they reach a fair distance away from the checkpoint and Purpled has assessed his injuries. He slumps down in his seat and crosses his arms, looking at Sam who has his eyes firmly on the road.

"That's not good... right?" Purpled says slowly, "Like— all of that," he gestures over his shoulder. "That's not a good sign. Right? For Logstedchire? Are we fucked?"

Sam sighs, "I— I don't know, Daniel."

"That's adult for we're fucked!" Purpled throws his hands in the air, "Level with me Sam, what the fuck are they gonna do?"

"I don't know."

"Well someone has to know something!" Purpled slams his hands against the dashboard. "What if you weren't there— what if you couldn't prove I had an alibi? Not everyone is going to be that lucky—"

"Then they'll look into them and find they're not Theseus," Sam says easily. "They'd look into you and find you work at the tower, no vigilante is stupid enough to associate themselves with the heroes— not enough that they work with them."

...

Yup... no one would be that dumb.

He thinks about Tommy and himself. And Techno when he was a vigilante.

Yeah.

Who would be that dumb?

No one would every associate with the heroes while a vigilante—

Not like anyone's done that before.

Sam mistakes Purpled's silence for anger and he glances at Purpled again, "I am sorry."

"What did they take?" Purpled asks, "Elysium— what can they take? Why do we have something so dangerous in the tower?"

"I was doing testing on it," Sam keeps his eyes on the road, this time they seem like they won't waiver. He's hiding something. Not lying, but not telling the whole truth. Purpled knows body language and he knows that when Sam gets nervous he hunches his shoulders towards his ears and... Sam's shoulders look pretty close to his ears at the moment. "Figuring out how it worked."

"What was it?" Purpled asks, "Why wasn't it in a lab? Why were you experimenting on it? How can— not at *all* subtle members of what has been labelled a terrorist organisation break into what's supposed to be the second-most secure building in L'Manberg? Tell me what's happening, Sam."

“It doesn’t concern you,” Sam snaps.

Purpled closes his mouth.

“Then why does this matter?” Purpled gestures around him to the flashing lights and the officers patrolling the ground like nothing else. “Why the fuck is this happening right now if it doesn’t concern me? Why was I held against the ground and read my Miranda Rights—which technically isn’t correct but doesn’t matter— why did any of that happen if it doesn’t concern me?”

“What Elysium took from the tower has no concern to you.”

Purpled hits his hands against the dashboard again, looking at Sam, and Sam doesn’t bother to glance at him.

“I work as fucking security!” Purpled yells, “My job is to make sure the tower is *secure* .”

Sam glares at the road.

Purpled crosses his arms again and sinks back in his seat. He also stares at the road. “I will find out what they took.”

Sam pauses for a moment, glancing at Purpled. “Yeah. I’d hope so.”

“What does that mean?”

“I mean, Tommy just helped them escape— I’d hope he’d have at least a little bit of a reason
___”

Purpled has never felt fear like he has in that moment, his stomach drops completely and it feels like his breath freezes in his throat. Sam knows. Sam— Sam knows. Purpled reaches down to his bag.

“If you get out the gun,” Sam hisses, “I will turn this car around and let them search through your bag.”

He stops reaching towards his bag.

His entire chest feels frozen, yes he knows fear, he is still freaking out about Tommy, he still doesn't know if he's okay. Or if he'll be bleeding and— now Sam knows and Purpled glances back down at his bag.

There's a knife in the front pocket.

“You know?” Purpled whispers, “Pull over the fucking car.”

Sam doesn't pull over the fucking car.

“How— what— how did you—”

Sam manages another glance at him, “It's not hard to figure out if you're looking for it—”

“Pull over the fucking car.”

Sam doesn't.

Purpled is preparing to get himself out of this car.

“I’m not going to tell anyone,” Sam says evenly. “No one has to know that I know. And no one has to know that you are half of the esteemed Logstedchire four.”

“Are you fucking blackmailing me?” Purpled screeches.

He needs to calm down— be calm and also normal. He needs to calm down. He’s fine. He glances at himself in the mirror. His face is completely blank, maybe a bit of worry on his face if he lets himself have it.

Despite the blank expression on his face, he feels like his entire world has been thrown on his head.

“I suppose,” Sam says slowly, his voice is uncertain as he says it. Like even he’s not sure of what he’s doing. “That’s not what I’m trying to do. I am trying to tell you, that believe it or not there are more people in your corner than you think.”

Purpled clenches his jaw.

Sam doesn’t say anything.

“How can I trust that you won’t snitch, especially after tonight?” Purpled snaps.

“Because I’m the reason blue was in the tower,” Sam responds, remarkably coldly, it’s almost chilling. “There. You have a secret, I have a secret. Blue was in the tower because I was figuring out how to change it for power suppressing cuffs— designed specifically for Theseus.”

Purpled’s mouth falls open.

“And I’m helping design the facility that is being prepared for Theseus in Pandora’s.” Sam also adds, like that in itself isn’t Earth-shattering and makes Purpled’s chest feel tight again. “There.”

“They’re designing Tommy a specific cell?” Purpled almost-screams.

Sam doesn’t bother him with a response, and somehow that manages to piss off Purpled more than if he had done literally anything else. Purpled goes silent, looking out the window on his side and glaring at the buildings they drive past.

It is one of the most awkward car drives he’s had.

And he’s been in a car with a vigilante-anti, two vigilantes and an ex-vigilante.

Eventually, (thankfully) they manage to get home. Sam rolls up outside of Purpled’s apartment, and Purpled does not hesitate to grab his bag and open the door, he doesn’t even say thank you.

In fact, he goes to slam the door shut all angsty-like and flip off Sam as he drives off, instead, his inner Tommy Underscore takes over and he glares at Sam he manages to smile, despite it all.

“For heroes,” Purpled snarls, “None of you really seem to be good at protecting the people who actually need it.”

He slams the door shut.

He reaches the door of the apartment, his heart suddenly jumps into his throat and his hands go cold again. What if Tommy’s hurt or bleeding and Purpled can’t fix it— or he’s not home at all, or he’s hurt—

What if he's laying in an alley somewhere— what if—

He skips two stairs as he runs up.

Eventually, he reaches their landing and Purpled runs at the door.

It's not locked—

It's not fucking locked—

Purpled swings the door open and stares at Tommy sitting there. He's on the floor, he looks asleep and he's leaning against Techno's chest.

Purpled— he can't—

“Bastard!” Purpled yells and Tommy jerks awake.

Techno's eyes flicker up to look at him and his hand tightens around Tommy's shoulder slightly.

Purpled genuinely believes that he could take Techno in a fight right now.

“What happened to your face—” Tommy says.

“You fucking—” Purpled grabs the closest thing on his right before throwing it at Tommy, it happens to be a teaspoon, Techno deflects it away with his hand. He grabs another spoon before throwing it at Tommy. “You bastard!” He yells.

Tommy just looks at him, with both curiosity and fear in his eyes.

“I thought—” Purpled’s words become more choked— he can’t cry, he can’t cry— Techno is here and he already hates crying in front of Tommy. “I thought you died, you bastard— I saw you get shot, and you didn’t get up and I thought you were—” Purpled wipes the stray tears in the corner of his eyes. “You fucking—” he picks up another spoon and throws it at Tommy.

It misses.

“I hate you!” Purpled yells and judging by the look on Tommy’s face he knows that he doesn’t mean it either. “I fucking hate you! You’re the worst— you can’t— you can’t just—” he wipes furiously at the tears in his eyes.

Purpled grabs the next thing, and it’s a tea towel. He bundles it up into a ball before throwing it with as much force as he can.

But it’s a fucking tea towel— not known for being aerodynamic.

It flops on the ground at Purpled’s feet.

Maybe it would be funny if Purpled wasn’t actually about to murder Tommy.

“Stand up,” Purpled snaps.

And Tommy, who seems a bit terrified, stands up despite Techno trying to grab him.

Purpled takes a few long steps over to Tommy.

“You—”

Purpled grabs him by the shoulders before pulling him into a hug.

Tommy freezes for a moment, before relaxing into the hug. He flings his arms around Purpled and buries his face into his shoulder. Tommy's entire body shakes and Purpled doesn't know if he's crying or not— but he thinks he is.

He doesn't know, and he doesn't care.

Because Tommy isn't hurt, and he's okay and Purpled hasn't lost another person, he's still standing in front of him.

"I thought—" Purpled breaks the hug and holds Tommy at arm's length, "I thought— holy shit I thought you were dead you bastard," he slaps Tommy in the arm, there's no real force behind it. "And— fuck," Purpled wipes at his eyes again.

He looks at Tommy for a long moment, there's something broken in his expression and they both know it, Tommy is a lot of things, but broken might just be one of them. Purpled's bottom lip shakes dangerously.

"I'm okay," Tommy promises.

"Yeah..." Purpled says carefully.

He can't cry— he can't cry, he can't cry— Techno is watching him and Tommy is going to feel bad and Purpled honestly doesn't like the way Techno is holding his shoulders like Purpled's the threat here.

Tommy nods, looking at him.

Purpled looks at him for a moment longer.

And because at the end of the day, he's only a child.

He starts crying because he was raised as a traumatised child assassin, his body doesn't shake with sobs, and he doesn't really make any noise apart from sniffing and tears rolling from his eyes steadily.

Tommy just looks at him with gentle eyes.

"Bastard," Purpled mutters.

Tommy hugs him again.

"Techno..." Tommy says gently, "Can you like... I dunno go into a bedroom or something ___"

Techno is less of an asshole than Purpled thought because he doesn't say a word, only heading towards Tubbo's and Ranboo's bedroom— although Purpled's not sure of exactly how much of their room it is anymore—

He leaves and Purpled looks at Tommy.

"You— asshole," Purpled yells, he hits one of his fists into Tommy's shoulder, it's not with any real force but it makes Tommy move back a little bit. Mostly from the shock, they both know it won't even bruise. "You fucking— asshole!"

Tommy doesn't say anything, he just holds his ground.

He's not scared of Purpled.

Purpled really would like Tommy to be at least a little more scared of him because he might actually murder him.

“Stop looking like I'm not about to murder you!” Purpled yells, “I'm gonna rip your spine out— or maybe I'll fucking stab you in the kidney a bunch of times—”

“You won't hurt me,” Tommy says easily, “It doesn't matter how pissed off you are with me. You're not gonna hurt me.”

He's right.

Purpled's not gonna admit that though.

Tommy already knows it, Purpled also knows it.

“I am considering it,” Purpled snaps, his gaze sharpening and glaring at Tommy just a little bit more.

They both stare at each other for a long moment.

Tommy's hands are shaking.

Purpled pauses for a moment, opening his mouth and then closing it again, trying to collect all the thoughts running around his brain.

“Don't you ever fucking do that again,” Purpled snaps.

“Purpled—”

“Listen to me dipshit!” Purpled yells, “Alright?”

Tommy just looks at him, apparently for once in his life he learns

“I’m not gonna spin the bullshit that I can’t live without you— I can, I did before and I could again but I don’t *want to*,” Purpled snaps, he tries to stop himself from crying and fails a little. “But I don’t *want to*, you— you dickhead, you made my life so much better and I thought— I lost you and, fuck—” he wipes at his eyes again. He can’t start crying again,

“Purps—”

“Shut the fuck up,” Purpled snaps and Tommy shuts the fuck up. “I thought— I thought you were fucking dead. Let that sit for a moment, Tommy, you need to understand. I thought I watched you get shot and you *didn’t get back up*.”

“I got back up,” Tommy says quietly, “I always will—”

“You won’t!” Purpled yells, and his own force surprises him. “One day someone’s gonna hit too hard or you’re gonna give up or— but if you keep going, the way you’re going,” he gestures broadly at Tommy. “And I don’t want—”

Tommy stares at him.

“You’re my best friend,” Purpled manages, voice shaking, “And— you matter to me, and— you’re not allowed to leave me like that!” Purpled prods Tommy in the chest and he moves back a bit, “If you die I’ll kill you.”

“Huh?”

“I will, defy every law we know and bring you back to kill you myself. You don’t die until you’re at least— eighty and have a million kids.”

“I don’t want kids—”

“Well, you’re having them anyway bastard!” Purpled yells, “You’re making it to your seventeenth birthday, then your eighteenth and then twentieth and you are not dying before you get to live! Okay?”

“Purpled—”

“Shut the fuck up, actually shut the fuck up,” Purpled snaps, “I care about you asshole, get this through your thick fucking skull!”

Another moment of silence and Purpled can see the conflict on Tommy’s face.

Tommy opens his mouth and closes it again.

“You shouldn’t care— I’m not a good person—”

“I care,” Purpled snaps, looking at his best friend, and wishing he never got that stupid fucking job with the heroes.

“Why?” Tommy whispers.

“I care about you because you’re *you*! How could I not?” Purpled yells and it feels like the walls close in around them, “You’re you, Tommy! I don’t care— you’re you, whatever you

think is bad, it's a part of you and I care about you! Not just the nice bits that you want Wilbur or Phil or Ranboo to see! I care about *you* and— yeah sometimes you might be a bit selfish or rude or loud or angry but— that's still you! I still care about you when you're being a dickhead, I still care about you when you make me *think you're fucking dead* but guess what Tommy! You're not a murdering monster despite what you think. You might be rude or annoying or loud or angry— but that's you and that's the shithead I care about!”

Tommy just stares at him.

“Get this, through your dense fuckin’ skull,” Purpled grabs Tommy by the shoulders, “People care about you. Because you’re you, no matter how terrible you think that person is. I care about you— Techno does, Wilbur does, Dream does, people care about you. All the bits you don’t like.”

“You’re not allowed to make me cry,” Tommy mutters through tears.

“You made me cry,” Purpled snaps, “It’s only fair.”

Another moment of silence and Tommy has tears streaming down his cheeks.

“I had one brother leave me,” Purpled says, he tries to keep his voice from shaking and his eyes from flickering away. Yet his voice shakes and his eyes dart away anyway. “Don’t make me lose another one.”

“You’re not gonna lose me.”

“It feels like I already have!” Purpled yells, he takes a few steps back from Tommy and runs his hands through his hair. “You’re always zoned out— or hurting, and you— you’re not the same, I don’t expect you to be the same, that’s not fair on you. But you’re not the same person I met, and I’m fucking terrified for you, Tommy—”

“Purps—”

“How much more can you take away from yourself?” Purpled says, and there are tears in his eyes— he’s not sure if they’re angry tears or sad tears or something in between, but there are tears. “Like— fuck off— you don’t always need to be the hero or the villain or whatever you think you are. Sometimes you can just— *be*. ”

“Purpled—”

“Shut the fuck up, I’m talking and I need you to hear what I have to say and I need you to understand it. That you don’t have to be anything— okay? You’re good enough as you are. I get that you have this weird complex thing because of your parents and Business Bay—”

Tommy winces at that.

“And I get that you need to prove yourself, but it’s going to get you killed. And I can’t have you dead Tommy—”

Purpled opens his mouth and closes it again, before looking at Tommy.

“I can’t have you—” he wipes tears out of his eyes even more, “This isn’t some fancy message or— I want you around, I want to see you happy, and you can’t do that if you’re fucking dead and don’t you even try joke about that, I want you to be happy.”

Tommy just stares at him, he doesn’t say anything.

“You deserve happiness,” Purpled says, “And if I’m the first person to say that to you then I’m sorry.”

Tommy just nods, eyes filled with tears.

“I want you around,” Purpled says again, “Okay? I want you around, okay? And you’re scaring me, and you’re being risky and you’re making bad choices and I think it might be on purpose. You’re scaring me, you’re scaring a lot of people— and I don’t want to watch you tear yourself apart.”

“Purpled,” Tommy steps forward, “I’m okay.”

“You’re not—”

“Purpled,” Tommy’s voice finds more force, “I’m okay, you’re not gonna lose me.”

Purpled watches him, not saying anything as he takes another step towards him. There’s something caring in his eyes.

“Purpled, listen to me— you’re not gonna lose me.”

“Tommy—”

“I know you’re worried,” Tommy says gently, “I know— and I’m sorry, and please trust me.”

Purpled nods.

He accidentally makes eye contact with Tommy.

Because his powers are a curse, emotions flood through Purpled.

Stupid fucking— stupid fucking empathy powers.

Fucking—

Guilt, guilt, guilt— it's all fucking guilt. *Anxiety, anger, guilt, guilt, guilt*—

Purpled breaks his eyes away from Tommy, the emotions from his powers still flowing through him and his heart beating in his chest. He can barely breathe, everything's dragging down at him. It hurts—

He takes another look at Tommy, managing to avoid his eyes, and there's something upset on his face and something so broken and upset and—

Purpled starts crying.

Again.

It's his first real cry since Punz left him.

It's been years.

An actual sob rips itself from Purpled's mouth and he can't do anything apart from let Tommy hug him. He grabs onto Tommy's jumper and tries to stifle his sobs, but he was trained to stop his emotions before they started, not to stop them once they've already started.

Tommy doesn't say anything, just holding onto Purpled as he cries into his shoulder. He grabs onto Tommy and lets himself cry because it's all too much at once and he doesn't know how to be a good friend, he doesn't know how to be anything but himself and whatever he is isn't working—

And Tommy is amazing, and just holds him.

“Thank you,” Tommy whispers, holding onto Purpled like if he lets him go the world will collapse. “For everything— always.”

Purpled cries a little bit harder and ruins Tommy’s jumper.

Neither of them mind.

And Purpled cries for a bit more, then a bit more and then he decides—

That’s enough of that.

So he stops crying.

Honestly, he thinks that freaks Tommy out a little. One second he is crying so hard his ribs hurt and the next he’s standing up straight, face completely blank apart from the stray tears still in his eyes.

Tommy stares at him. “Huh?”

“Enough of that,” Purpled wipes away more of the tears, his throat still feels off and his chest hurts from the heaving sobs.

But he’s okay— he’s actually okay.

Right?

Tommy stares at him with wide eyes and Purpled pointedly doesn’t make eye contact because he thinks that might burst him into tears again and Purpled’s had enough of crying and letting Tommy see him cry.

“Are you— are you alright?”

“Are *you*? ” Purpled replies, his voice isn’t exactly mean, it isn’t overly nice either. “You worry me.”

“You’re worrying me,” Tommy gestures at Purpled’s face, the mark that has probably become a bruise at this point. “What happened—”

“Almost got arrested,” Purpled mutters, “They figured that I looked a bit like Theseus and did the whole— ask questions later thing, and got my face dropped into the ground. It looks worse than it is.”

Purpled has no idea how it looks, but it feels pretty bad.

“Are you okay?” Tommy shrieks, “Purpled what the fuck are you alright? What’s happening?”

“Yeah,” Purpled shrugs, “I’m not the one who just got a bounty on their head from literally all the heroes— I’m not the one who just beat up two of my friends— why the fuck did you do that, by the way?”

“Huh?”

“Side with Elysium!” Purpled yells, before taking a deep breath and trying to calm himself down. He manages it before glancing back at Tommy. “Why would you—”

Tommy takes a deep breath, “It’s— it’s kinda a long story.”

“We have nothing better to do.”

Tommy sits down, just... on the floor. Doesn't even move to the dining table, and Purpled sits down on the floor across from him, scowling.

Punz works for Elysium...

He knows this.

And— he doesn't like how they could be similar, how Punz and Tommy might be more similar than he wants and Purpled doesn't want Tommy working for Elysium— he wants to leave Punz and the baggage he brought along with him in the past and if Tommy is dragging something up.

“Techno took me to Reddings.”

“What?”

“There's— more to it, but I hurt someone— pretty bad, I don't regret that one. And he took me to Reddings to figure out how my powers worked. And— well I met this wither skeleton hybrid who has the ability to like manipulate memories and make people re-remember things and— I have the same thing. But besides the point— you already knew this.”

“You gave me no details on it though.”

“Doesn't matter,” Tommy mutters. “Just— long story and I found out that blue was made... by the hero tower. Then some fucking politician decided to ruin lives with it— and— and basically, Elysium—”

Purpled knows, but he has the feeling that Tommy needs to explain this, for his own wellbeing.

“Broke into the And— they got the chemical formula and they burnt it and— fuck,” Tommy runs his hands through his hair again. “Then Wilbur and Fundy and I was scared and I was angry and I am so sick of explaining this— I just... I don’t know.”

Purpled just tilts his head at Tommy.

“Why are you not freaking the fuck out?”

“Sam told me. He told me a bunch of other things too, actually, like uh— he’s the reason blue was being actively used in the tower, oh, and a minor detail, nothing too big.”

Tommy crosses his arms, raising an eyebrow.

“They’re preparing you, well Theseus, a cell in Pandora’s,” Purpled says and watches as Tommy’s face falls. “Sam knows our identities and is also helping design the cell.”

“What— what— what?” Tommy says, waving his hands and shaking his head. “Slow down, what the fuck do you mean— he knows our identities? How does he know?”

“Used a braincell?” Purpled suggests, “Now Sam and I both have blackmail over each other.”

“I— Purpled—” Tommy’s hands are shaking, “What the fuck do you *mean* that Sam knows that we’re vigilantes.”

“I don’t know,” Purpled replies, “Okay— he probably figured it out by watching us interact once. If someone wants to see something— they’re gonna see it, not everyone is Wilbur, ignoring the obvious.”

And Purpled watches the way that Tommy’s seems to curl in on himself when Wilbur is mentioned, like it actually hurts him— and Purpled... well he doesn’t know what to make of that.

“That—” Tommy starts pacing, “That— they’re organising a cell for me in Pandora’s— cool — cool that’s fucking amazing I am so chill with that, and the person organising the cell knows I’m— well me, even fucking better!”

“We can look into Sam,” Purpled argues looking at Tommy as he’s pacing, “We can blackmail him. You know we can— everyone has *someone* they care about. You’re not going to Pandora’s.”

“I—” Tommy runs a hand through his hair and it sticks up in a million odd directions. “I kinda just beat up two of Sam’s friends, Purpled.”

“What do you mean...” Purpled says slowly. “Tommy what the fuck do you mean—”

“I didn’t back away from the fight,” Tommy snaps, “And I— I fought with Wilbur—” his voice breaks slightly. “And Fundy and— I fucking won, I won and— and... I’m sick of running away from fights.”

“Huh?” Purpled whispers.

“I dunno,” Tommy yells, “I’m— sick of losing and not being able to fight back. I’m so sick of having to take the moral high ground. Wilbur hurt me first, I hurt him back and—” his voice breaks again, he pauses before taking a deep breath. “I’m tired, Purpled.”

Tommy doesn’t make eye contact, he’s learnt better than that.

“Aren’t you tired?” Tommy whispers, “Of all of this,” he gestures around him. “I’m tired. I— Purpled aren’t you tired? Of all the lying and pretending and— I’m so, so tired, Purpled.”

Another long moment of silence.

Tommy shakes his head, like he's getting rid of unwanted thoughts, "Whatever," he says, "It's— everything is going to shit. I get it, and—" He cuts himself off. "Doesn't matter, doesn't— nevermind."

"It does," Purpled says, "Tommy what's happening up in there."

"Doesn't matter," Tommy mutters and Purpled *knows* he's lying.

"Tommy—"

Tommy ignores him, instead heading towards the door where Techno is and Purpled— kinda tunes out whatever they say.

He's worried for Tommy.

He doesn't really know why, but something uncomfortable sits in his stomach and he tries to ignore it. But something about the way he was talking and acting and— it just doesn't sit right. It makes Purpled...

Feel off.

He tries not to let himself think about it too hard, even when Tommy and Techno are laughing and Purpled wants to join in, but Tommy's smile isn't reaching his eyes anymore and— when was the last time it really did?

Purpled doesn't remember most of the rest of the day, he's thinking too hard.

Tommy and Techno decide to go to sleep early and he knows Techno promises to stay the night because Tommy is scared someone will break in.

They drag all the mattresses in the apartment out into the lounge room, because Tommy is still shaking so badly and neither Techno nor Purpled knows how to stop it.

So they drag a million blankets out into the lounge room.

Techno insists on a blanket fort, so he grabs the dining chairs. He puts two of them on either side of the long mattress they've created. Techno is the one who teaches them 'the correct blanket fort technique' which mostly involves putting heavy pillows down to hold the sheets in place.

Then they have a blanket fort.

They try to watch a movie but Tommy flinches at every loud noise and they decide to maybe not to do that and instead go the fuck to sleep.

Surprisingly, Tommy falls asleep quickly.

He snores softly, head buried in the pillow and laying on the mattress like he's not sharing it with anyone else.

Techno is almost pushed completely off the end, Purpled has a whole mattress to himself, which he enjoys and scrolls on his phone as Techno worldlessly fights with Tommy for space on the mattress.

Somehow there are three mattresses on the floor and Tommy is taking up two.

Eventually Techno wins the battle to gain some space on the mattress, having shoved Tommy away.

There's a silence for a few moments as Techno just sighs.

“You alright?” Techno asks and Purpled looks up from the spot on the blanket he was focusing on.

“Huh?”

“Are you okay?” Techno says slowly, eyebrows furrowed. “You’re— you seem a bit freaked out by this.”

“How could I not be?” Purpled asks, looking down at Tommy. He’s between the both of them, basically curled around himself into a ball. It doesn’t look peaceful at all, Purpled thinks that once upon a time Tommy slept peacefully, he doesn’t anymore. It looks like he’s in pain. “He’s— worrying me.”

“He’ll do that,” Techno murmurs, fondness in his voice. “I guess that’s what you do for the people you care about, they worry about you and you worry about them— and I guess that’s how complicated it is.”

“You really pretend you know it all,” Purpled mutters, leaning back so he’s looking up at the sheet that is their blanket fort roof. “Tommy thinks the world of you, thinks you can do no wrong. Ender— you should fuckin’ hear him, *‘Techno said my hair makes me look like a drowned rat.’* Or like— *‘Techno hugged me today.’* Ugh— it’s gross.”

Techno smiles and rolls his eyes. “I don’t know it all.”

“You act as you do,” Purpled says, “I don’t think you know jackshit about jackshit, but for some reason, Tommy thinks you do and—” he glances at Techno, careful not to make eye contact. “I’m deciding if that’s enough for me.”

Techno nods, before also laying down.

Cool, no forced eye contact involved, the ideal timeline.

The roof of the blanket fort really isn't interesting. But Purpled finds himself staring at it anyway.

"What don't you know?" Purpled asks.

"Lots of things."

"I need examples."

"Why you seem to actively hate me— I don't know what Tommy did to Fundy, and why he moved past the topic, I don't know why he's scared all the time. I don't know why I keep covering for someone after he hurt my brother. I'm not sure how I'm going to deal with Phil because he knows that I know who Theseus is."

Purpled goes quiet.

"I don't know why I ran away from the fighting ring as one of my best friends bled out on the floor, I don't know— I don't know what to do."

Purpled lets out a low whistle, "Sheesh, way to trauma dump."

"We were having a moment."

"You were having a moment."

"I'm gonna make us have a moment, have any fears?"

“Plenty.”

“Tell me something you’ve never told anyone.”

“For Prime’s sake,” Purpled mutters, sitting up and looking at Techno who looks calmer than anything. “You’re like— my friend’s older brother trying to befriend me, you don’t need to fuckin’ befriend me.”

Techno just looks at him.

Purpled gives him a look back.

They’re both quiet for a long moment.

“Blood,” Purpled whispers, “I— I don’t deal well with blood. I dunno why, it doesn’t make sense considering my upbringing. I used to just pass out at the sight of it— I’m a bit better now after patching up Tommy and myself enough, but if it’s like *a lot* and mine?” Purpled shudders, “No, no thank you.”

Techno nods, he doesn’t make fun of him.

The jokes basically set themselves up, a child assassin scared of blood, a vigilante scared of blood, and someone who pretends to have no emotions passes out at the sight of a bit too much blood.

But Techno doesn’t take any of those easy jokes.

“Tell me something you’ve never told anyone,” Purpled says, “Can be about anything.”

Techno hums, crossing his arms and looking up. “How dark can we go?”

“As dark as you want to.”

“I used to hate Wilbur,” Techno stares up at the roof like it wronged him. “After— well, something traumatic happened to him and he basically— forgot two years of his life. And—” Techno laughs, “Those were the two years where we became friends. And I hated him because of it for a long time.”

“Holy shit.”

Techno manages a small laugh. “Yeah... I hated him for a while because of it, because I’d befriended— well I’d befriended a ghost. And— he was my closest friend and he just... knew nothing about me. He remembers bits and pieces now, but— I hated him for a really long time because of it.”

“Do you still?”

“No,” Techno screws up his entire face, he almost looks pained. “Never— I can’t hate him, not really... not anymore. It wasn’t his fault and then I did therapy and now I’m back in therapy and like— yeah, I’m figuring it out.”

“Is Wilbur... like alright?” Purpled asks.

Techno laughs so hard that Tommy stirs, they both go quiet for a moment and he goes back to sleep.

“Wilbur is about as alright as Tommy. Fucking—” Techno laughs again, this one is a bit sadder.

“He should go to therapy.”

“But that’s admitting that he’s been affected by it all,” Techno says quietly, “For some reason, he thinks that going to therapy is admitting some sort of defeat. Yes, someone did fuck him up, and their impacts still affect him. He doesn’t want to give them that power. I have a feeling Tommy’s the same way.”

Purpled doesn’t say much, only crossing his arms.

“Will Tommy be okay?” Purpled eventually manages, and both of them pretend they can’t hear the emotion in his voice. “Do you—” he takes a deep breath. “Do you think he’ll be okay?”

Techno looks at Tommy, he’s sleeping— or maybe pretending to sleep, it’s hard to tell the difference anymore. It doesn’t matter either way.

Another moment of silence.

It seems to stretch impossibly long and Purpled can feel his stomach dropping and dropping as every second seems to tick by.

“Yeah,” Techno says and Purpled looks up at him, his expression contorting. “Tommy— he’ll be okay. You’ll both, be okay. You have each other.”

“Sometimes a person isn’t enough.”

“And sometimes it is,” Techno glances between the both of them. “I heard you two arguing— I was trying not to, but you weren’t exactly quiet.”

Purpled frowns.

“And the thing that got me,” Techno says, “Is that even though you were threatening him, not meaning it of course, Tommy— said something like *‘I know you won’t hurt me.’* And I don’t think I’ve ever heard him sound that confident about anything.”

Purpled just looks at him. “Huh?”

“Purpled, an abuse survivor looked you in the eyes while you were arguing and said that he knew you weren’t going to hurt him. Do you understand that?”

“I— I guess?”

Techno looks at him for a long moment, tilting his head at Purpled, like he’s trying to understand him better. See right through him. See right through everything that makes him—well him, but Purpled has too many walls up and the only person who has ever *seen* him is snoring.

He apparently gives up, and Purpled is grateful for that.

Another moment of silence and neither of them has anything to say.

“Thanks,” Techno says and Purpled glances up.

“Huh?”

“For— looking after him,” Techno taps Tommy on the side of the forehead and Tommy screws up his nose. “I don’t think anyone’s told you that, that you’re an amazing friend and Tommy thinks— that you’re one of the most important people in his life.”

“It’s too late for emotions.”

“It’s like... oh shit, it is too late for emotions.”

Purpled laughs and rolls over, facing toward the rickety wall of their blanket fort. “One more thing, one last emotion before we vow to never speak of this again.”

“Sure.”

“I don’t think Tommy would be here without you,” Purpled murmurs, “He doesn’t talk about what happened at the warehouse or after and I know it has something to do with you— but— I don’t think he’d be here without you— so thanks for that,” he adds the last bit casually, something lighter

Techno snorts.

“I wasn’t around for a while,” Purpled says eventually, “Scared of attachment or whatever, and— I’m here now and regret I wasn’t sooner. So thanks for— I dunno, everything? Nothing? The bare minimum and risking your neck for him.”

Purpled doesn’t see Techno’s face, but somehow he knows that Techno’s smiling softly.

“Thanks,” Purpled eventually says slowly. “And if you— ever hurt him, on purpose, they will never find the fucking body. If you sell him out— if you tell Wilbur or Phil before he’s ready. Arrest him? Hurt him on purpose, and I will kill you.”

Techno goes strangely quiet.

“I’ll kill you,” Purpled says to the wall. He manages to roll over and look at Techno, who is frowning slightly.

Techno doesn’t say anything for a long time, it feels like at least a minute of Purpled avoiding eye contact and Techno looking at him.

“You’re just a kid,” he says, it sounds upset, something a bit broken. “You’re all just fuckin’ kids.”

Purpled rolls over and goes to sleep after that.

And he tries not to think too hard about Techno’s voice, the way it sounded... a bit broken and like a terrible realisation. He tries not to think about the expression on his face and the way he glanced down at Tommy and looked even more horrified.

Were they really kids anymore?

Had they even been kids to start with?

He tries not to think about it.

Sleep doesn’t come easily, but it does eventually. Purpled doesn’t have a dream that he can remember, and he doesn’t wake up to Tommy screaming in his sleep, or thrashing around which is always nice.

What he does wake up to, however is Tommy and Techno being all brotherly.

Tommy is passed out, mouth open, laying flat on his back with his arms sprawled out around him. The blanket is half kicked off of him and Purpled has the mind to laugh, he doesn’t... but he almost does.

His hand however is grabbing onto Techno’s hair.

Not very hard or with a lot of force, but Tommy is reaching for Techno. Techno has an arm thrown over the top of Tommy and is sleeping face down in his pillow. It doesn’t look

comfortable at all, but it makes for a funny photo.

So Purpled just does that.

Techno with an arm thrown over Tommy and Tommy grabbing onto Techno's hair.

Sadly, that's about the only good thing in the morning.

The rest of it is a fucking mess on several levels.

First thing, Tommy decides to go to work.

The second thing, Techno allows this to happen.

Third thing, they take public transport— nothing in particular happens, public transport just sucks in general and someone gives Purpled a weird look. Then Purpled reveals the knife held in his hand.

They back off after that.

As a group they all got to the tower, Kristin buzzing them in after passing security and Purpled says hello, because he's actually a polite person. Also because Kristin is lovely and the world needs to know it.

After a not too long elevator ride they end up on floor 69, which Tommy laughs about as he presses the buttons.

“Wilbur thought it would be funny like eight years ago,” Techno deadpans, “He was right but it now means that—”

The doors to the elevator swing open.

Wilbur is standing basically across from them, in the couch area, he's leaning against the back of the couch, arms crossed. He's smiling slightly, but— Prime— he does not look good.

He looks... like shit. He has an ugly black and blue bruise around his eye, it looks painful and almost swollen slightly? His lip is split and there is still some dried blood around his nose. On his wrist is a blue cast that goes up to about his mid-forearm. His hair looks like it needs a wash and there's a few odd cuts littering his face.

Purpled glances at Tommy.

“It's only a hairline fracture—” Wilbur says, swatting at Phil. “It's not like I can't breathe, stop mother henning me.”

Tommy seems to close in on himself, his eyes go towards the floor and Purpled— he doesn't know how much to describe it than the fact Tommy gets really small, it's like he wants to melt himself into the ground.

What is going on in his head right now?

Wilbur bats Phil in the shoulder with his good hand, “Phil, stop henning, I am fine.”

Phil does not appear to stop mother henning him.

He pushes an icepack into his hand and Wilbur just looks at him like he's going to commit several fucking crimes, and honestly— Purpled can appreciate that..

“Oh, hey Tommy,” Wilbur says, before waving at Techno and Purpled. “Hi. Phil’s being all concerned because he’s saying my eye is swelling, the fuck it is not, I got checked out and everyone said I was fine.”

Phil sighs, running a hand down his face. “Wilbur— just put the icepack on your eye.”

“It’s literally fine,” Wilbur mutters, but he does so anyway. “So,” Wilbur looks up at the three of them, “How has your day been?”

“Fine,” Purpled says easily.

Tommy looks up, opening his mouth as if he’s going to say something. Then he shuts his mouth again, before walking at an incredibly speedy pace towards his office.

He knocks past Purpled and basically runs down the hallway to his office.

Techno and Purpled exchange a quick glance, before Techno takes a few slower steps and follows after him.

Purpled is... left out here.

He moves over to the island bench that has become so well known in his mind. It’s like the staple of the SBI floor, the kitchen and living area, it is easily the nicest in the entire tower and most people go up here if they want to actually prepare food.

Because Purpled doesn’t want to deal with this, he picks up his phone and starts scrolling through the mayhem that has become his Twitter timeline, everyone talking about Theseus and Spectre or Elysium—

Wow. This is a mess.

“You haven’t slept,” Phil says.

“I never fucking sleep,” Wilbur mutters, “I slept like two days ago—”

“You’re going to genuinely pass out.”

Wilbur shrugs.

This feels like a theme in his life, he’s forced to listen to conversations he doesn’t want to hear.

Phil glances at Purpled.

He must be satisfied that Purpled is too invested in his phone to pay much attention to whatever they’re saying.

There’s a moment of silence between the two and Phil is the first one to speak, “Are you off your medication?”

“It fucks with my powers!”

“Wilbur,” Phil deadpans, “They help—”

“Regulate my mood and my sleep and literally everything about me, yes I know, makes me less irritable and sad and— like I get it, I am much more likeable when I’m having them.” Wilbur mutters, he shoots Purpled a glance and Purpled doesn’t look up from his phone.

He pretends to be immersed in sending a really aggressive email— this might make him a shit person, but if Tommy and Techno are gonna have secret conversations then Purpled wants something out of it.

Phil sighs, “Wil, you’re fine the way you are.”

Wilbur glares at him for a moment, “They make me all fucking spacey—”

“I know, Wilbur, but you asked to be on these— we can go back to the doctors or get them adjusted, but I think it would be better for you if you’re on your

“Well they make my powers weaker.”

“They’re supposed to do that, Wilbur.”

“Well, it makes me all spacey and weird,” Wilbur glances at Purpled again, Purpled doesn’t react to that. “I don’t like feeling like that—”

Okay Purpled is a bad person, but he’s not that bad. He is not going to be listening to Wilbur go off about this.

He decides that he’s heard enough and he looks up from his phone, “Yeah?” He says, looking between Phil and Wilbur. “What was that, sorry?”

He is such a good actor.

For fucking real.

Wilbur opens his mouth, looking at Phil for help.

Luckily they're interrupted—

There's a noise and the elevator door opens, Dream basically runs in, in all of his glory, and by that Purpled means it looks like he's been hit around the head several times. He's breathing heavily and holding onto the wall.

Why the fuck does Dream run everywhere—

He's always slightly out of breath when barging into people's areas has he considered like... not?

“Where's— Tech and Tommy?” Dream pants.

“Talking in Tommy's office,” Purpled adds, “Why?”

“Turn on the TV— news channel,” Dream says between panting breaths, he takes only a few moments before basically sprinting to Tommy's office and flinging the door open.

Wilbur and Phil rush over to the TV, concern written all across their faces.

After general commotion from the office, Techno, Tommy and Dream also join them at the TV. On the screen is well... what looks like the set up to a presidential address. With the podium and the stage and—

Oh.

Oh, shit.

Tommy stands next to him, their shoulders brush and Tommy crosses his arms. He stares at the TV and seems determined on not even looking at Wilbur, he keeps his eyes ahead, occasionally flickering to look at Tommy or Techno.

Techno sits down on the floor, and a wild Floof joins him, sitting on his lap and looking at the TV like it's the most interesting thing in the world. Phil sits down on the couch and Wilbur stands behind the couch, arms crossed.

Dream... well Dream sits on the arm of the couch.

Which, Purpled can respect, he sits on the fridge at home a lot, much to Tommy's disgust and displeasure.

"Let's see what today's hot take is," Dream deadpans, arms crossed.

Tommy and Purpled glance at each other.

The president— a nameless face, one of the many who all blend into each other. One with false promises and that Logstedchire fucking *hated* it was amazing. Purpled doesn't remember this one's name, he does remember— literally nothing. This one used to be on the hero commission— maybe?

Jones? Is it President Jones— no, it's something else—

Purpled glances around the room.

Techno seems... the most agitated out of all of them. Glancing up at the TV every few seconds then looking down at Floof again. Wilbur and Dream seem pretty calm about the whole thing and Phil is... being Phil drinking coffee, he also seems relaxed.

That seems to be a good sign.

The bitch-ass of a president... President Jenkins...

Jenkins? That sounds about right.

Purpled doesn't know if that's accurate but that's what he's gonna call him. Walks onto the stage, and Techno seems to be even more nervous.

He clears his throat and shuffles his papers on the stage. *"Last night's attack on the heroes tower was deplorable—"* the cameras start clicking so loud that Purpled actually flinches back slightly. *"It was a cruel disruption of our justice, our highest order, our most powerful people in the world."*

Dream scoffs.

"What... this group did, was steal several things of high importance from the nation's symbol of justice and integrity. They broke in, and like snakes, they slithered to what they wanted and they took it, snatching it from the hands of rightful justice."

Tommy's hands clench into fists by his sides.

"What did they take?" Purpled deadpans, arms crossed, "If it's so important why won't they name what it is?"

"We haven't been told," Phil says easily, "What they took, some of the heroes have been told — Puffy and Sam were told... I don't think any of us have been told though."

Techno doesn't say anything, just watches the TV quietly.

"And these criminals, these scoundrels, originating from Logstedchire."

Purpled pretends that everyone doesn't turn to look at Tommy and himself.

"They took... something, something of great importance to us."

Blue. They took blue.

"What did they take?" Wilbur asks.

"Blue," Techno says easily.

Wilbur's mouth fully falls open.

Techno— wow, he is not holding back today.

"There's blue in the tower?" Wilbur yells, "Why the fuck is there blue in the tower—"

"Don't act shocked," Techno deadpans, not looking away for even a moment. "Of course they did, how were they going to make power suppressing cuffs otherwise? They've been trying to reverse engineer it— Jenkins won't admit it, but anyone with a brain can figure it out."

"And what they also took," President Jenkins pauses, really building up the tension. *"We believe that they can use this... against everyone else in L'Manberg, we believe that they could use it to infect the water supply. They'll use it in your child's school food—"*

"What the fuck?" Dream says.

“They will attack every single one of us with it. These thieves, these terrorists—from Logstedchire, they will attack the good people of this nation with the very thing we sought to destroy.”

Techno looks like he might try to murder another president.

“Along with the addition of criminal Theseus, another Logstedchire resident, and another terrorist. We have reason to believe that the citizens of Logstedchire enabled his escape from authorities last night—these traitors to their nation allowed a horrible, hardened criminal to run away, run from the hand of justice.”

Purpled looks over at Tommy, his eyes have gotten... Purpled doesn't know how to describe it, but cold. Tommy's always so full of life, constantly talking, hand movements, even when he sleeps, he's talking but...

There's nothing there, not really.

Just a sort of blankness, a sort of apathy.

Purpled decides he hates it.

Tommy isn't like Punz—

The feeling in his stomach tells him otherwise.

“Theseus.” Techno laughs, “It's always Theseus, like there aren't any issues in Logstedchire that might lead to the vague feeling of civil war.”

Wilbur jerks a little at that, something in his face hardens and he stands up a bit taller. Purpled tries not to think too hard about it, instead, he just looks back at the TV, where Jenkins is *still* talking.

“I believe there is due cause for a curfew in Logstedchire, enacted immediately—”

“That motherfucker!” Techno yells, actually standing up and Floof looks at him. “Where is this address being given?”

“City Hall,” Purpled glances at him. “On the front lawn, I recognise it— there’s still construction in the background. Fixing it up after the gala y’know.”

Techno does know.

“As it has been proven time and time again, the people of Logstedchire can not be trusted, which is why they hide behind drugs and vigilantes and things that are tearing our nation apart! No other district has to hide behind vigilantes or drugs, no other district would aid Theseus in his escape, no other district would now have the sole access to the stolen items—and no other district would attack their own country with it.”

“Fuck.” That is what he decides on saying. “Shit.”

“Due to these drastic— awful events originating from the citizens of Logstedchire I am immediately enacting a curfew. From nine at night to seven in the morning, unless you have a valid permit issued with your place of work. Otherwise, you will be apprehended and you will be arrested.”

“Logstedchire has night shift workers,” Tommy says weakly, “Most of— most of Logstedchire have late hours or early morning shifts or— most people there don’t fucking work nine to five.”

“Crossing into other districts at this time,” Jenkins says, “Means you will have to go through one of the newly established checkpoints. Your bag will be searched, your ID will be looked at, and if there is due cause to believe you will cause trouble you will be apprehended.”

Purpled stares at the TV, mouth open.

“Surely they won’t apprehend people—” Dream says, “Not for... what exactly are they looking for?”

“Anyone with suspicious behaviour,” Techno picks up Floof from the floor and hugs him. Floof doesn’t seem overly fond of this idea, but doesn’t protest, instead he looks at mildly uncomfortable as a dog can.

“They can’t do that—” Dream starts.

“They can and they already have,” Purpled deadpans, “Last night— ask Sam.”

“Huh?”

“I kinda match Theseus’s description,” Purpled keeps his arms firmly crossed, challenging anyone to speak up about that statement, “Light hair, teenager, kinda tall, and hesitated to grab my ID. That’s what due cause is, even if I had gotten it out in like two seconds they could’ve decided something was dodgy. Sam stepping in is the reason I’m not paying a lawyer right now.”

“We can get you an exemption,” Phil says quickly, looking at Purpled and Tommy before his eyes dart to Techno. “You won’t have to—”

“But other people will,” Purpled replies coolly, “Jenkins is giving cops the power to arrest people for— whatever, speaking back— not letting them take your money. And no one fucking gives a shit because it’s Logstedchire and the president just told the entire nation we’re fucking dangerous because of the place we live in!”

Their argument about the political state of Logstedchire is quickly cut off by Jenkins who is still fucking speaking.

“These measures might seem drastic,” Jenkins says and Purpled does not think he’s ever been this close to just... ripping someone’s throat out. “But I am doing what is needed to protect the rest of us, to protect our homes, to protect the people we love. So our children do not get poisoned— and become the monsters that can be created if Elysium runs Logstedchire. So our children do not have to grow up in a world where a terrorist organisation holds the most power over the justice provided to us by the heroes. A world where children in costumes can run around and be protected by its citizens.”

Suddenly Techno trying to murder the president when he was a teenager makes a lot more sense.

“I will protect this nation, and if that means protecting it from itself. Then so be it. I will be taking no questions at this time— my decisions are final, and are the best for the wellbeing of the nation.”

He walks off the stage.

Purpled just stares.

“We’re fucked,” Tommy says, “We’re like— properly fucked, oh my Prime— shit.”

“We’re fucked,” Techno adds.

“How can they—”

“As if they haven’t been making reforms and attacks that affect Logstedchire specifically for decades,” Techno snaps, “That’s why vigilantes are so hated— the first fucking heroes were vigilantes. Vigilantes exist in every district, they’re just allowed to become heroes in every other district.”

“Why’s this bad— wait no, like I know it’s bad— but why does it seem world-ending?” Wilbur says, he gets a few sharp looks from that, “And I am completely aware this is me being a sheltered rich kid.”

“At least you’re self aware,” Purpled mutters.

“Well,” Tommy actually makes eye contact with Wilbur and doesn’t flinch away— baby steps. “The president just kinda... implied that the million or so people in Logstedchire aren’t... really citizens of this nation. Implied all of them are terrorists or enabling terrorists, uh— specifically targeted lower-income people who tend to work varying hours. And uh implied that we’re all going to attack their children. Which— y’know, is pretty fucking harmful. Oh! And he also said that the police can arrest you at checkpoints for... basically anything, and no one can do anything about it.”

“That’s not amazing—”

“Targeted blue hybrids specifically,” Techno adds, his tone clipped. “Called them monsters, again— pretty fuckin’ harmful.”

“Oh,” Wilbur says. “That’s— yeah that’s not amazing.”

Techno actually laughs at that, and everyone looks at him confused. “For Prime’s sake, you’re awkward.” He laughs again, shaking his head this time. “Rich kid learns about systematic targeting of the poor, and his head doesn’t explode or anything.”

“It also won’t do anything,” Phil says, “Elysium is already operating outside the law, as are vigilantes. Making more laws for them to break won’t deter them, and— annoyingly they’re clever. They know what they’re doing. This just makes the people of Logstedchire angrier and more likely to rely on...”

“Unconventional methods?” Dream offers, “If the institutions let people down they’ll go to other places.”

“There’s gonna be protests,” Techno says. “It’s gonna be messy.”

Purpled glances at Tommy, who is staring out the window, his eyes aren’t quite here but he doesn’t look like he’s in pain. So he’s not thinking about something worse— he might just be thinking.

It doesn’t look pained though, which seems rare for Tommy.

Purpled looks back at the screen, where some poor intern is fighting for their life being asked questions. He glances at Tommy again.

It’s odd to think that... in a way Tommy caused all of this.

His actions literally affected the entire nation, the decisions of a teenager who was scared and probably having some trauma brought up, if Purpled had to guess, was now going to lead to protests and probably riots and— well not a civil war but as damn close as someone could get.

Tommy... has too much influence for what is essentially a child. A mentally ill— very, very traumatised child. Purpled doesn’t say anything because... well he doesn’t have anything to say, Tommy’s looking at the window and a level of uneasy silence settles around them.

Phil clears his throat and everyone looks over at him.

Purpled is exhausted.

He needs a long nap, it’s been a very stressful few days.

“Techno,” Phil says, “We need to talk about Theseus.”

Tommy glances away from the window, looking straight at Phil and Techno catches Tommy's eyes for a moment. He glances at everyone around them, mainly at Tommy and Dream, "Can we not— right now?"

"I think we're talking about it now," Phil replies, "You've already avoided the topic all of last night and you didn't pick up your phone or go to hospital when Wilbur was hurt."

Tommy's face drops.

Oh. Okay then.

"I was busy," Techno snaps, "Believe it or not, my entire life doesn't revolve around you and Wilbur," he glances at Purpled again, something a bit more desperate in his eyes.

Oh— he wants Purpled to try and de-escalate whatever war is currently about to break out. Right, okay— uh, his de-escalation skills aren't the most amazing thing in the world.

"Look," Purpled says, "You probably shouldn't be having this conversation while Dream, Tommy and I are around— I love family drama as next as the next guy, but this— no thank you."

Phil's scowl deepens and Wilbur pulls a face.

"Okay," Phil keeps his voice even, despite the glare on his face. "Everyone out, apart from Techno, Wilbur and I."

"Phil—" Techno says, and instead he gets a withering glare from Phil, which makes him close his mouth and look at the floor.

Purpled is more than happy to get the fuck out of the room, he does not want to deal with whatever shouting match is about to take place, he's not the biggest fan of yelling, and he

does not need this to be happening.

So he grabs Tommy by the shoulders and heads to the door.

“Daniel,” Techno says and Purpled stops in his tracks.

He turns around trying to give Techno his best *‘please don’t do this, don’t make me stay’* look, and if Techno knows what he means then he certainly doesn’t care, because he points at the ground.

Dream seems to pick up on this, because he grabs Tommy by the shoulders and leads him out of the room, muttering something under his breath that actually gets a little laugh out of Tommy.

Good.

Someone needs to make Tommy laugh right now, and if it can’t be Purpled or Techno, then Dream’s a pretty good second option.

Purpled takes a deep breath before standing by the door.

“Why is Daniel here?” Wilbur replies, tone sharp, “He’s just security.”

“You may fucking need security for when I’m done with you,” Techno snaps.

Right. Family drama.

Cool.

Yup.

Purpled can handle this, he copes really well with yelling and threats, this is going to be amazing for his mental health. Really, he's looking forward to it, out of everything he could be doing today this is number one on his list.

There's another moment of complete, and awkward, silence as they all look at each other.

Purpled looks at the ground.

Why was he dragged into this? Why is this his life now?

Phil sighs, "Techno—"

"I'm not telling you," Techno says easily, "No matter what, I'm not telling you who Theseus is. I'll never tell you who Theseus is—"

"That fucker beat Fundy and I up!" Wilbur yells and Purpled takes a deep breath, they're in this for the long haul then. "And you're not gonna tell us who that fuckin' freak of nature—"

Techno's face turns deadly, eyes narrowed and glaring at Wilbur. He looks like he might rip out Wilbur's throat, and Purpled would probably let it happen if he was being completely honest. That takes Wilbur by shock, and his eyes widen slightly.

"If you," Techno snarls, "Call Theseus that again he will be the least of your problems. You're an adult, choose your fucking words better."

Wilbur looks fucking terrified.

It's almost funny.

Purpled manages to stifle the urge to laugh.

“He— he fucked with my memories!” Wilbur yells, and that makes the anger on Techno’s face drop into one of confusion. “He— I don’t know how he did it, or why he did it but— but — it was like I was back with Eret! And I couldn’t fucking breathe and—”

Wilbur cuts himself off and runs a hand through his hair. He looks like he’s about to cry, he wipes at his eyes, and Purpled is grateful for that because he doesn’t want to deal with a crying Wilbur Soot.

“Okay,” Techno says slowly. “What do you mean—”

“It was like,” Wilbur doesn’t sound very calm, but Purpled appreciates the effort he’s putting into trying to sound calm. “Like it happened again, I just— just saw it again, like— like for the first time. And my chest felt like it was collapsing in on itself and the pain, holy fuck, the pain— and I—”

“Right,” Techno starts pacing up and down, “You’re not making this easy for me—”

“Just tell us,” Phil says, and his voice is warm, and maybe if Techno was a little bit weaker he’d let that work, and spill all his secrets. “We can have him arrested in a few hours and then all of this can be over—”

“They’ll make him become a hero,” Techno snaps, “They’ll question his friends and family and he will never have a normal life ever again. That’s not fair—”

“Neither is Theseus attacking Fundy and Wilbur—”

“Wilbur started it!” Techno yells, and Wilbur flinches back slightly. “Months ago— it was months ago. You both attacked Theseus. Wilbur you fucking busted his ribs— why? He was just on patrol, he wasn’t doing anything!”

The other two just look at him.

“You traumatised a kid!” Techno yells at Wilbur, taking striding steps over to him, “Badly— you hurt him and he’s still hurting and if you back a scared person into a corner they’re going to bite and kick and scream—”

Purpled looks at Phil.

It looks like he’s aged several years.

Good.

Purpled’s shot him in the shoulder once for Tommy, he’d do it again with no hesitation.

“He used Fundy as a human shield!” Wilbur yells back, “I hit him and now Fundy flinches when I move too fast—

Techno looks at Purpled. *‘Did you know this?’* His eyes seem to say.

Purpled shakes his head.

“—And you’re fucking defending him. I’m your brother and you’re defending and risking it all for someone who hurt me!”

Techno pauses, “Is this what this is about?”

A moment of hesitation, and Purpled can feel the tension in the air.

“Of fucking course it is!” Wilbur yells, throwing his arms up in the air. “Why do Phil and I keep getting left to the side for a kid you barely know? Why do you defend him— you’re our family, and you keep— you keep allowing us to be hurt!”

Techno doesn’t say anything, his entire face is blank, his mouth pressed into a thin line.

“Why am I second best?” Wilbur yells, “I’ve been second best for— ages, and then you show up in my life who puts me first for once. I’m not second best to the hero agency or someone else and then you abandon that? For what— it doesn’t make sense! Your worry and care for Theseus doesn’t make any fucking sense.”

“I—” Techno says, “Wil, you don’t come second.”

“Well, I sure as fuck don’t come first either!” Wilbur yells.

“I— I know,” Techno keeps his voice even and Purpled is impressed because if he was a normal person who wasn’t trained to be an assassin he would be crying at this point.

Wilbur however, looks like he’s about to cry again. “What the fuck?” He yells, “You— you, dickhead! He hurt you too! Have you forgotten that, the whole shit with the warehouse, he hurt you too— now you’re a fucking hybrid and your organs changed shape, your bones moved around— it doesn’t make any sense.”

“Wil,” Techno says gently, “I— I can’t explain this.”

“You fucking can!” Wilbur yells, “I know you can, Phil knows you can— everyone in the fucking tower knows you can explain this. You just don’t want to— you’re projecting onto Theseus, you want to be the hero. You don’t know Theseus!”

Techno doesn't say a single word, he just takes it.

“And—” Wilbur wipes at his eyes furiously, “Yeah, I fucked up with the whole treatment of Theseus early on. I know that I hurt him and I regret that— I wouldn't do it again— but— it's not fucking fair. Theseus is only trouble, he barely does anything good!”

“For you,” Purpled adds.

Phil glares at him with enough force that Purpled is genuinely surprised he doesn't burst into tears.

Wilbur glances at Purpled then way again. “It's not— it's not fair!” Wilbur yells, “You've forgotten who matters for fucking Theseus, someone who hurts people over and over again and doesn't seem to show any signs of changing or remorse!”

Techno nods, “Wil, I can't— I can't explain why this matters.”

“You can!” Wilbur yells again, wiping at his eyes, he's properly crying at this point. “I know you can! It just— it doesn't make sense, why the fuck is Theseus worth all of this?” Wilbur gestures around him, “It's not— it's not fair!”

Techno nods, “I know Wil, I know it's not fair— I'm so sorry.”

“You're an asshole, you know that?” Wilbur yells, “You're a fucking— piece of shit. I wished you were thrown in Pandora's— I wish Phil never got you out of it!”

There's a heavy silence.

Well, that was not the right fucking thing to say.

Techno doesn't react much, he just takes a deep breath. "I know you don't mean that. You can say that you do, but I know you don't."

Wilbur just glares, "I don't— I'm sorry."

"I know," Techno says evenly.

Another moment of silence.

Wilbur looks at Techno, "I didn't— I didn't mean that, I'm sorry. I didn't mean that, I don't —"

"I know, Wilbur," Techno says evenly, "I know you don't mean it."

"I'm just," Wilbur wipes at his eyes more, "Really fucking mad and— I'm sorry and—" Wilbur shakes his head.

Techno goes to step towards him.

"I can't do this," Wilbur says, looking up, he looks Techno in the eyes as he says it. "I can't — fuck you," he says. He doesn't shove at Techno, but it looks like he has half the mind to. "I hope you're fuckin' happy."

Techno looks at him, he just looks— upset, there's not a lot of other ways to describe it. He just looks so incredibly upset. "Wilbur— I can't— I can't explain this, okay? It's not my thing to explain. And I'm sorry I can't explain it, I wish I could."

Wilbur just looks at him, somehow he's managed to look more upset than Techno. He's not quite crying, but it looks like he's about to. "You are the— fucking worst," Wilbur ends up

saying, “You think you have the moral high ground over me? One of us has killed people and it’s not me!”

Techno for a moment almost lets himself get angry, he takes a deep breath, controlling whatever anger passed for a moment.

Purpled’s almost impressed.

This man surely goes to therapy, because Purpled would be throwing things at this point.

“You’re not some beacon of goodness and truth because you— I don’t even know!” Wilbur yells, “You’re being an asshole, and normally you aren’t so much of an asshole!”

Techno doesn’t say anything.

How much patience does this man have?

“You—” Wilbur wipes at his eyes, before gesturing to his cast, “Don’t seem to really give a shit. And I know you do care, because you’re you, but you’re not going and amazing job at showing it.”

Techno nods, mouth pressed into a firm line. “I know.”

Wilbur looks like that’s about to make him burst out into tears, he wipes at his eyes again. Before shaking his head. “Fuck this,” Wilbur mutters, he looks at Techno then his eyes dart to Purpled.

And he basically runs out of the room, not quite run— but it’s a brisk walk for sure. He wipes his eyes as he goes.

Purpled... actually feels bad for once.

Why the fuck does he feel bad for Wilbur—

He just wants to be someone's priority, the little bitch of a voice in the back of his head almost whispers. Aren't you the same in that way?

Purpled ignores the logical part of his brain, the one that wants to go after Wilbur because he *gets it*, he understands it, in a weird twisted way. He gets what Wilbur means.

He'll die before he admits that though.

Techno immediately turns on Phil, "You could've stopped that, you piece of shit."

Phil nods, arms crossed. "Or he could've repressed that."

"Oh," Techno throws his arms up into the air and he looks at Phil, "Alright, so it's fine for him to yell at me. Cool, he couldn't have— I dunno told me that over a coffee or something, I dunno what normal people do but it sure as fuck is not wish their brother is in Pandora's!"

Phil sighs, "Techno—"

"Do you think that

"I am an adult, so is he, we're allowed to have different opinions on things," Phil snaps, which is a pretty solid point actually. "He's allowed to speak his mind. I'll speak to him about this afterwards."

“I don’t want you to,” Techno snaps, “He’s old enough for his own opinion right, and if that opinion is for me to have been thrown in Pandora’s when I was like— thirteen, then sure! That’s a healthy and also normal thing to say to your younger brother.”

Phil sighs, “Techno—”

“I know he doesn’t mean it, that still doesn’t mean it doesn’t fucking hurt.”

“I can’t control what either of you do,” Phil says, “You’re both adults.”

“So you’re saying Wilbur’s opinion on Theseus has nothing to do with you—”

“That’s not what I’m saying,” Phil sighs, “Tech, Wilbur has a point. It’s unfair that we just have to suffer while you know who Theseus is and you could end all of this,” he waves a hand around him. “You could stop this.”

Techno glares. “And you could’ve stopped all of the outcry when I was arrested,” he smiles slightly, there’s nothing happy about it though. “And you could’ve stopped me from even being arrested to start with, and you could’ve stopped Wilbur and Eret—”

“Don’t you fucking bring that into this.”

“I will fucking bring that into this,” Techno snaps, “If Wilbur can bring Pandora’s into this I can bring Eret into this. You could’ve stopped a lot of things in your life Phil, terrible things, but you didn’t— because you cared more about one person than multiple. You cared more about me than the hero agency and the fucking law, you cared more about Wilbur and Eret than the fucking law. And I care more about Theseus than the law.”

“Do you care about him more than us?” Phil asks.

Techno scowls, his glare somehow deepening.

“This isn’t me trying to take a jab, it’s a genuine question.”

Techno’s jaw clenches. “I don’t know,” he mutters, refusing to make eye-contact with Phil, “And that’s the fucking terrifying thing. I thought you and Wilbur would always be the most important thing in my life, and you are— I just— I don’t know.”

Purpled just looks at Techno, mouth slightly open and eyes wide.

Phil takes a deep breath, “Theseus is someone important to you,” he says slowly, eyes closed, with a deep breath.

Techno nods.

“And I’m guessing he reminds you of yourself.”

“Yeah.”

“Then—” Phil takes another deep breath, “Then I can not fault you for that, I mean... I saw a pink-haired vigilante about ten years ago and— reminded me of myself. Just— be careful, I think Theseus is dangerous, you don’t— just please be careful.”

Techno nods.

“I—” Techno glances at the door, where Purpled is standing and where Wilbur ran out of a few moments before. “I didn’t know about the— Fundy thing, he didn’t— I didn’t know and — that’s fucked.”

Phil nods.

Techno takes a deep breath, “If I believe Theseus is ever a real threat— if he keeps hurting people on purpose, I’ll arrest him.”

Purpled manages to keep his mouth closed, with great difficulty. Phil seems also shocked at that, and he nods once.

“I—” Techno looks down at his feet, “Theseus isn’t dangerous— but the decisions he’s been making are concerning and— if he needs to be arrested, then I’ll be the one to do it. Okay?”

Phil looks at him for a long moment, tilting his head slightly and he nods again, “Okay,” Phil says gently, “Just— do what you think is right, I trust your judgement, despite the fact I’m not amazing at proving that,” he laughs awkwardly, “But— just be smart, okay?”

“I will,” Techno says.

“I’m gonna—” he points at the door and backs out slowly, “Bye?”

Techno looks only a little amused as he walks towards the door, opens it clumsily and closes it again.

Purpled doesn’t waste any time in throwing the knife on him at the camera set up in the room. The camera itself falls to the ground, and Purpled catches the knife by the hilt. He takes a few steps over towards Techno and knocks him into the wall, holding the knife under his chin.

Techno looks mildly amused, a little bored as well.

“You won’t arrest Tommy,” Purpled snaps, “Remember what I said last night? If you fucking — arrest him I will not hesitate.”

“Wilbur had a point though.”

“I know,” Purpled says slowly. “I don’t care.”

“I have been putting Tommy and Theseus above everything else that’s important to me. Phil and Wilbur are... so important to me, and so is Tommy— I can’t— I hate lying to them.”

“And?” Purpled yells, “It’s— it’s Tommy, who cares?”

Techno pulls a face, “Purpled, I have more people I need to care for than Tommy.”

“So do I.”

“Do you?” Techno challenges.

Purpled goes quiet at that, pointing the knife under Techno’s chin, Techno doesn’t flinch, he doesn’t make eye contact either.

“Look,” Techno says, “I don’t want to arrest Tommy— but you have to be stupid to not see that his actions are harmful. I trust that you won’t let anything happen to him anyway, not really.”

Purpled glares, “What do you mean?”

“I know you have escape plan upon escape plan,” Techno grabs Purpled’s wrist and moves the knife away from his throat. “But I can’t have Tommy running around hurting people I care about.”

“He’s a kid.”

“I know.”

“It’s not— it is his fault, but not really.”

“I know.”

“That’s not fair.”

“Yeah,” Techno nods, “I know. It’s not.”

Purpled just looks at Techno, “If you arrest him, I’ll—do something. If Tommy goes to Pandora’s I will not rest until he’s out, or anyone responsible for it is at the bottom of a ditch.”

“I’d expect no less,” Techno sighs, “Purpled— I— I can’t keep risking everything to save Tommy. I can risk a lot— I will risk a lot, but I— I’m not sure how much longer I can do it, knowing how affected Wilbur is by it.”

“I can hit you until you stop remembering it,” Purpled suggests.

He’s only half joking.

Techno seems to note the sense of seriousness in his voice and raises an eyebrow.

Purpled needs a swift change of topic—

Right, he’s great at topic changes, a pro even.

“I can’t believe Wilbur being sad is what would make you arrest him.”

Techno shakes his head, “It’s Tommy being a threat to himself and others, I’m more worried about him being a threat to himself, if I’m going to be completely honest. Just— don’t you get worried?”

“Arresting him isn’t the answer! It just pushes your issues off for a couple of days, Tommy would hate you forever.”

Techno sighs, he runs a hand through his hair and Purpled just watches him. His hair is about shoulder length now, still the offensively bright shade of pink, but it actually has a slight wave to it now. “Yeah.”

Purpled glares, “You— he— you can’t abandon him.”

“I’m not abandoning him,” Techno says, and he sounds sure of himself. Purpled almost lets himself believe in him. “Okay? Never that— if Tommy hurts someone else, on purpose and hurts them *badly* then I’m going to step in, whether that’s physically stopping him from hurting someone else, or arresting him? I don’t know. But— I can’t let him hurt people.”

“You hurt people,” Purpled replies sharply. “When you were younger than him.”

“Yes,” Techno sounds tired, just... so, so tired, “And I still haven’t forgiven myself for that, I don’t want Tommy to go through the things I went through.”

“Then don’t arrest him.”

“I’m only going to arrest him if things get drastic!” Techno raises his voice, before taking another deep breath to calm himself down and he looks at Purpled. “If Tommy— I dunno,

kills a hero, or seriously maims one. I would be an awful friend if I let Theseus get away with severely hurting one of the heroes.”

“You’d be a terrible friend to Tommy.”

Techno pauses for a moment, “Yeah, guess I would.”

“You’re contradicting yourself,” Purpled complains. “You’re making no sense.”

“I don’t know what to do, okay?” Techno yells, and Purpled doesn’t flinch backwards or raise his knife again. “Okay? There, the grand truth— I don’t know what the fuck to do anymore, believe it or not Purpled, I don’t know shit about shit. I have someone I care about so much— like a little brother, and he’s displaying worrying behaviour and I’m hurting my older brother and dad because I have to keep his secret. Can you not see this from my perspective? I don’t fucking know what to do!”

“I am not even remotely qualified to deal with the emotions you’re having right now.”

“Neither!” Techno starts pacing up and down the room again, and where the fuck is Floof because Floof would calm him down at the moment. “It’s a whole fucking mess of miscommunication and— lies and, I dunno how much longer I can keep it up, Purpled. Wilbur is fucking livid with me, and he has reason to! He doesn’t get it because he can’t get it and—” he pushes his hair back with his hand and Purpled watches him as he walks up and down. “Why am I dumping this on a child— what the fuck is wrong with me—”

“I don’t mind,” Purpled shrugs, “I mean... it doesn’t seem like an... easy situation? And I don’t think you exactly have a plethora of people to talk about this with.”

Techno sighs, before sitting on the floor, it takes a bit of effort because of his prosthetic leg but he manages it.

“How old are you?”

“Seventeen.”

Techno sounds like he ages several years. “Cool,” he whispers, “Cool, cool, cool— amazing, great and that’s also fantastic.” He sighs, running a hand down his face, “I—” Techno sighs before sitting up a bit taller. “I don’t have to worry about this now.”

“You don’t,” Purpled nods, glancing at the door, “I mean— you should probably tell Tommy about this, at least, that feels like the morally correct thing to do.”

Techno nods, muttering something to himself. He seems to confirm whatever he said to himself and nods. “Prime, this is not an easy situation to navigate.”

Purpled shrugs, sitting down on the floor in front of Techno. “Have you considered just not.”

“Huh?”

“I mean— you don’t like— have to deal with it now?” Purpled says slowly, “Like— okay, so basically— I mean Tommy hasn’t done anything terribly illegal yet, so why would you deal with it until you had to? Also— I am not letting you arrest him, just by the way.”

Techno raises an eyebrow, “And how do you plan to stop me?”

“Probably with a sharp object.”

A moment of silence.

They both know he’s not joking.

Somehow that makes it even funnier.

“Right, uh—” Techno nods, before laying back against the floor, arms spread out either side of him. “This is all a bit fucked.”

“Yup.”

“Between the political targeting and the— you are surprisingly easy to talk to.”

“I just nod and laugh in the silences.”

“You are my least favourite human,” Techno sighs as he looks up at the roof with a bit more anger.

Purpled just grins, “I don’t think that’s even remotely true.”

“I hate how you speak like Tommy does.”

“Shockingly enough,” Purpled deadpans, “You pick up people’s speech habits when you’re around them long enough. Fucking *wild* how that works.”

“I hate you,” Techno mutters.

“You simply do not.”

“Stop speaking like Tommy!”

Purpled leans back on his hand, he's not laughing, but he's smiling a little, "Nah," Purpled looks up at the roof, still smiling slightly. "I don't think I will."

"You're the worst," Techno mutters.

And... they both know he doesn't mean it.

For some reason that makes Purpled not smile as such... but he lays down on his back and look up at the roof. Maybe if he was a normal person he'd be grinning, but he's not a normal person. So he's content.

Purpled glances at the person standing next to him... she has dirty-blonde hair, it's not super curly but there's waves in it. Purpled knows her— they work together a lot— what the fuck is her name? Purpled isn't amazing at remembering.

Emily?

No. Not Emily...

Emma, that's Emma. She's nice.

"Uh," Purpled says, glancing at Emma. "What the fuck?"

"Protest," Emma explains easily, "Uh— yeah people aren't fucking thrilled."

"It's been," Purpled checks his phone, "Like an hour."

“Justice moves fast,” Emma deadpans, “I’ve been told we can’t let them in— and we’re not supposed to let them throw anything at the tower.”

Purpled raises an eyebrow, “And we’re... not gonna do that?”

“Fuck no,” Emma laughs, “Does it look like I get paid enough for this? If they want to throw paint bombs at the tower I’m not gonna stop them. I might actually show them the best parts to paint bomb—”

“Emma.”

“Yes?” Emma replies with a grin.

Purpled opens his mouth, then closes it again.

Okay then.

Purpled watches the crowds for a bit, all of them seem to know better than trying to break into the tower and Purpled is great for that, he doesn’t want to have to man handle someone out of the way.

The crowds are... chaotic, groups of people waving signs and yelling, and Purpled can’t help himself but feel just... a little bit proud. Of Logstedchire, of people for not taking the president’s shit.

In one of the crowds is someone with a sign, this in itself isn’t odd.

What draws Purpled’s eye to it is the drawing of Theseus on it. It’s not super detailed, but it’s clearly Theseus. With the black mask and the goggles and the hood. With little red lightning

bolts behind him.

“You see that too?” Emma asks.

Purpled nods.

Emma keeps her face mostly blank, but Purpled can see the corner of her lip move into what is almost a smile.

And as Purpled looks he sees more signs that have Theseus on them, with dumb little slogans and funny comments that have Emma snickering into her hand as they point them out together.

It’s funny.

And— maybe this is why Theseus matters.

Because people are screaming and shouting because of injustice and holding signs of what they expect the bare minimum to be. And that’s— Theseus, that’s Tommy.

That’s Tommy.

And Purpled hasn’t ever been so proud.

“So,” Emma tries to keep her voice neutral but Purpled can hear the smile sneaking up on her, “Theseus is becoming the face of— whatever this is.”

Purpled nods, “It appears so.”

“Good.” Emma says, “That’s— good.”

Eventually their shift out the front ends and they switch with other people. The sun is starting to set, and Purpled is more than ready to go home.

He still has a sense of pride in his chest, from— just being part of something, no matter how small it might be. It’s... really nice, in complete honesty. It’s just... really nice.

Grabbing his bag from the front desk he looks at Wilbur who is talking to Kristin. He doesn’t have the general shitheadness about him that he normally does while talking to Kristin, he seems a bit quieter and more subdued.

“I can take you if you’d like,” Kristin says, “I may not be helpful, but we could probably get it changed— oh hi Daniel!”

“Hi,” Purpled says, “Uh— do you know when Tommy’s coming down? Is he working late or ___”

“Wil sent him home,” Kristin glances at the sign out sheet. “About an hour ago.”

“You sent him home?” Purpled glances down at his phone, he doesn’t have a text from Tommy. That’s— that’s not comforting for fucking sure.

“Yeah,” Wilbur says, “He’s been— off, all day.”

“Oh?” Purpled says, he manages to actually sound slightly shocked by that, that honestly impresses him. “How so?”

“Just... zoning out a lot,” Wilbur looks over some other piece of paperwork that he’s looking at. “A bit spacey, a bit,” he waves a hand in front of his face, “Yeah—”

“Oh,” Purpled says slowly, “Uh— alright, I think I’m gonna head off. In case Tubbo is home — y’know,” he waves a hand, “Like you told me— so you can’t get pissed off at me.”

“I won’t get pissed off at you,” Wilbur deadpans.

“You aren’t in the most amazing mood—”

And that pisses Wilbur off.

Men these days—

Why the fuck has he picked that up from Quackity?

Purpled just gives his best awkward smile, no one has ever called him awkwardly endearing but he’s going to call himself that. He takes a few steps backwards, summoning his inner Thomas Underscore charm and giving an awkward, and extremely fake grin as he backs out of the door.

“You are so fuckin’ weird,” Wilbur mutters under his breath.

“See ya Kristin!” Purpled says, putting his backpack on before heading towards the front exit.

And so Purpled leaves.

Getting through the crowd of the protesters is surprisingly difficult, but he’s just one guy, so no one really notices the teenager in all black walking through the crowd. He breaks free of

the crowd without having anything thrown at him.

Honestly.

He'd take his chances with the protest over the tower right now.

He's glad to avoid the tension in the tower, and he is sick of having to deal with grown men having arguments. Instead he is going to argue with a grown— boy, probably, assuming Tommy actually went home.

The checkpoints are... as boring. Purpled shows his ID, lets them go through his bag a little bit, and Purpled acts like there isn't a hidden part of his bag where a few knives are stored.

Even if Purpled did get caught... he has enough money to bribe a guard.

The checkpoint doesn't— really know what it's doing, it's not officially been put into place and everyone awkwardly stumbles through. Purpled tries to ignore it all and instead puts his bag back over his shoulder and keeps on walking.

He tries not to think too hard about it, the implications and generally— everything that this is going to have.

The walk home is as peaceful as can be, a weird sort of subdued silence has found its way across Logstedchire, and Purpled knows better, there have to be protests and other shit planned.

It's just... quiet.

He hates it.

Purpled gets home in fairly good time, it's getting dark and he swings the door open.

Tommy is... sitting on the couch, eyes glued to the TV.

Purpled throws his bag onto the counter and walks over to the TV, it's a report about Theseus and Elysium, about their suspected ties. He shoots Tommy a look, but Tommy doesn't notice him.

So instead he picks up the remote and turns it off.

Tommy looks up at him, "What the fuck?"

Purpled raises an eyebrow, "You shouldn't be watching these—"

"You're the worst," Tommy stands up.

"What do you want for dinner?" Purpled calls out as Tommy walks towards their room. He is met with silence. "I will kill you!" Purpled adds.

Tommy peeks his head out of the door of their room. "Something chicken related."

"You literally can't eat any other kind of meat."

He seems to consider this for a few moments, before nodding his head, confirming that statement with himself. "Yeah..." Tommy says, "Uh— I dunno, like schnitzels or whatever. Or chicken tenders."

"We are not having chicken tenders for like the sixth day in a row."

“They’re good.”

“You actually need this little thing called, nutrition,” Purpled deadpans, “You’re lucky I like you actually having nutrition and the ability to function like a normal human.”

“Could have nuggets.”

“You need fucking protein,” Purpled mutters, “Just... go have a nap or something.”

“Am I a fucking toddler?”

“You eat like one.”

“I have dietary requirements!” Tommy screeches, “Just because I can’t eat *beef* or *pork* does not mean I eat like a toddler—”

“You eat like two vegetables.”

“The texture of carrots bothers me!”

Purpled sighs.

Tommy appears to sense he’s lost this argument and goes to sulk in his room.

Purpled goes to... make dinner, because whenever Tommy does dinner they eat something take away or chicken nuggets—

And while that's great they need to eat the odd vegetable now and again.

Halfway between chopping the chicken there's a bang against the wall.

That makes Purpled pause.

Now. Logic says Tommy just like tripped. But it's Tommy, and he always has something vaguely worrying going on. Purpled sigh to himself, turning around walking towards Tommy's room.

If Tommy's getting kidn

Purpled raises an eyebrow, walking over to Tommy's room and knocking on the door.

"Yeah?" Tommy yells out.

"Are you fucking fighting a bear in there?"

A moment of silence.

Purpled opens the door.

Tommy is in his vigilante gear. Window half open.

"Dude. I'm making pasta—"

Tommy looks at Purpled, giving him an awkward smile underneath the mask. “Fancy seein’ you here.”

“I live here, asshole,” Purpled deadpans, he leans against the doorframe, arms crossed as he watches Tommy half out the window. “You should be laying low.”

“I know.”

Purpled sighs, “Can I at least go with you—”

“No.”

“Tommy—”

“Nope,” Tommy shakes his head, “I just— need to thank some people for helping hide me— gonna drop off some money because I stole their food and shit. That’s all— I’ll be quick, in and out and nothing will happen. Stick to the shadows— you know I’m good at that.”

Purpled watches his best friend as he puts on the goggles that both of them appear to start hating, he hates the way that Tommy’s eyes turn into something... not cruel, but almost, they don’t hold the same joy they used to when he put on the goggles.

Purpled sighs.

Tommy is a lot of things.

Stubborn is at least half of them.

No matter what, Tommy would go alone.

“Okay...” Purpled says slowly, “Just— don’t do anything dumb.”

Tommy grins, clambering out of the window even more, “I won’t, when have I ever done anything dumb?”

The empty air doesn’t care about Purpled’s list, sorted alphabetically.

Purpled just sighs.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter Summary:

I will level with you. I have no idea what happens this chapter.

- Chapter picks off from about the middle of chapter 34, where Tommy is on his destroying shit arc. Purpled sees Tommy “get shot” and he goes down, he freaks out a bit
- Sam takes him home, but they pass a bunch of cops and the cops check their IDs and Purpled has a Purpled moment and because cops are dumb they assume that Purpled is Theseus and try to arrest him. They do not succeed however.
- Sam & Purpled argue, Sam reveals that he knows his and Tommy’s identities and that he is the reason blue is in the tower AND is helping design a cell in Pandora’s for Theseus
- Purpled gets home. Has a light breakdown because he is so fucking worried about Tommy
- Deadpan duo (purpled & techno) have a nice little chat, I forgot what about, but I remember I liked some of the dialogue lines there.
- WORK, THEY GO BACK TO WORK. Tommy is being odd and also sad. The President, President Jenkins decides that he hates Logstedchire and sets like a checkpoint and curfew and shit
- Techno, Wilbur & Phil fight about Theseus. Purpled is forced to be there. Wilbur gets really upset, Phil is like “Imao okay.”

- Purpled goes home and Tommy is gonna go out as Theseus and Purpled is like “you are a dumbass” but Tommy is stubborn so he goes. Despite the fact he’s one of L’Manberg’s most wanted criminals.

And to that one commenter who was like “i want better summaries” literally write them urself i am sleep deprived and also sick of your bullshit.

Little announcement too, due to the fact I can not fit everyone's art in the end notes anymore I have decided the fair course of action is to just not include any, I am really sorry about this but I don't want to have to choose between different pieces and artist because I don't think that's fair for anyone. I love and appreciate all the fanart I get (and secretly i save it all but shhh) and so I can't add it anymore, WHICH I AM GENUINELY VERY SORRY ABOUT IT I NEED THE WORLD TO SEE IT. If you wanna see dope fanart join the discord (you can figure out who to get there) or maybe have a look at the [Twitter hashtag](#) and there's a bunch of cool stuff also on TikTok under the [same tag](#).

ps. the next update might be sooner than you think :D

In Which Tommy Catches Hands and L's

Chapter Summary

Dream looks at him, before reaching for the mask.

“No!” Tommy yells.

Dream rips the mask off his face.

or, to everyone who's said “WOOOO POSITIVE DISCDUO IN TINAAOS” uh, no—
Tommy's about to ruin that real hard.

ALSO NIKI IS HERE AND I SAY THAT AS A RAGING HOMOSEXUAL, LOOK IT
IS SHE, SHE IS SO COOL!

Anyway... have fun! Last update of the TINAAOS update spree so <33

Edit from the Future

hey. cc!dream fucking sucks. due to this, tinaaos!dream has essentially being written out after this chapter, but because of how i need the plot to work, the impact of his character will still be seen within other characters. feel free to skip past the dream bits

Chapter Notes

And as always thank you to [TWILIGHT](#) for beta reading, and for making me add the scene with Sam and Purpled last chapter!!!! Also thanks for being my tina!purpled and generally just a lil' lad! Also, this is a very long chapter and thank you for dropping everything to read it! For any of you folks you should read [Aureate](#)! Or [JACAM](#) which I co-write with the beloved Twilight (Sparklez)

IMPORTANT NOTE:

I've changed some of the characters' superhero/vigilante names, here are the ones I have changed:

Fundy: Outwit

Sam: Vulcan

Niki: Aurelian

Shelby Shubble: Whirlpool

Warnings: panic attacks, violence, hair-pulling, lots of repeating phrases, non-consensual drug use, tommy asks someone to knock him out to calm him down from a panic attack. (that feels like a warning I'm not sure what tho.)

The panic attack starts from the line:

They both stare at each other, Dream moves his own mask up and stares at Tommy with wide eyes. "Tommy?" Dream whispers, "No, no— no it wasn't supposed to be you. No— no—"

and it ends at the line:

His phone buzzes and Tommy grabs it off the dining table before picking it up and holding it against his ear, not even looking at who it is.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy has made several dumb decisions leading up to this point.

There's... a lot, of dumb decisions he's made leading up to this moment. In fact, he could probably list them alphabetically— in fact, Purpled probably has them listed alphabetically.

Well, the first mistake Tommy made was... well putting a hero-sized target on his back. Yeah, he shouldn't have hurt Wilbur or Fundy and he has been crying for about twenty-four hours straight because of it.

Moving on from the complexity that is his feelings about whatever the fuck happened, because he does not want to deal with that again. He knows that Techno is giving him a judgmental as shit look, and they'll need to properly talk about that, now that Techno knows the full story and the actual damage Tommy did.

Purpled is— well he's being cool at least.

Anyway, moving on from whatever the fuck that is, and the thought in the back of his head which says Techno may sell him out because of this, he hops over the building and lands on his feet.

Moving through the air is easy, it's something he can do really well, he's practised, he's good at it. He knows the jump and the leaps and how to twist his body in the air. Thankfully he's not scared of heights when he's the one in control, well only a little bit— way less than normal.

He knows how to catch himself and he knows how to boost himself over a gap, he knows what to do, he's in control in all the ways that matter. He lands on the other side of a gap and pauses, breathing for a moment.

Right—

After a few moments, Tommy straightens back up and keeps running.

He hears a noise behind him.

That makes Tommy's heart jump into his throat, and for a moment he can't think. The fear floods his entire body, there's only a particular group of people who hang out on roofs and Tommy doesn't want to interact with any of them.

He leaps behind something that vaguely looks like it can hide him. He presses his back to the side of what appears to be an aircon unit. He presses a hand over his mouth to try and stifle his laboured breathing. Some of it is from genuine nerves and the other is from being not unfit, but not fit enough.

Tommy slows down his breathing.

Footsteps walk across the concrete of the roof and Tommy pushes himself against the side of the aircon as much as he can. He keeps his eyes open— no matter how much he wants to close them until the threat goes away.

He needs them open.

His hands are shaking—

Only one is held against his mouth and the other is by his side, it's shaking. He clenches it into a fist by his side, he doesn't wanna fucking deal with that. That doesn't work, so he presses the other hand against his mouth.

He's okay— it's okay.

“Clear,” the voice says behind him, and Tommy recognises the soft American accent and his stomach drops. It's Whirlpool— why the fuck did they send out her—

Tommy doesn't know a lot about Whirlpool, they haven't interacted much beyond passing a few words to each other. He does know her civilian name is... Shelby Shubble— yeah because she has the most superhero name in the world.

He also knows that she has some form of water manipulation, hence her name, Whirlpool.

Are they thin on heroes or is there something that Tommy doesn't know about going on here
—

He presses his hands against his mouth even more.

The footsteps pass across the other side of the unit and they pause.

Tommy holds his breath.

He manages to glance around, so he's looking at Shelby.

And yup, it's her.

Tommy is only vaguely aware of what she wears, from having to do some training video a while back. It's a simple enough outfit, she wears leggings and combat boots. She wears a blue raincoat with little speckles of silver and gold found on it, he thinks they're shaped by stars but he's not close enough to see. There is also a hood that goes over her head. Her hair is tied back, out of her face, and underneath the raincoat she wears a black long-sleeved shirt that's either part of the leggings or tucked into them.

Right.

Tommy might become soup today if he's not careful. He'll have to... leave and shit, run away forever potentially. And then he can go deliver his thank you money and leave. He can fucking go home.

Okay. New plan.

Escape.

"Aurelian?" Whirlpool repeats, "She's attacking the guard again? Okay— I'm on it."

Tommy leans slightly towards the side to hear better.

Whirlpool's footsteps move forwards and Tommy realises that she's going to circle around this while talking to whoever she's talking to— Tommy is almost for sure going to be found

out if he doesn't move.

The footsteps get closer and closer and Tommy realises that— *oh shit he has to move* .

Steadying himself he gets ready to move around the side of the unit, then he can fucking make a run for the edge of the building.

Her footsteps get closer.

Now or never, he supposes—

Tommy slowly takes a step forwards, hoping to sneak away.

This is one of the many mistakes he's going to make tonight.

Instead, a pebble crunches underneath his foot.

He can feel her gaze landing on him immediately.

Uh— shit, fuck, shitty fuck.

Whirlpool looks at him with wide eyes., “You're not supposed to—”

Tommy turns around before looking around, nothing around them— they're on a roof. Uh, he should be able to do something, literally anything— he can like... like... explode something or—

Whirlpool's eyes go wide at the sight of Tommy, she takes a few steps back and her breathing quickens. Not a lot, just the right amount that Tommy notices. Tommy looks at her for a long moment.

Apparently not too impressed with this she summons a ball of water which she spins around in front of him. There's something personal there— and now would be a great time to figure out if Shelby— Whirlpool, he keeps switching between names, and Wilbur were friends because that would explain a lot about this—

Shelby takes a deep breath, "Try me."

Then she walks forwards with the confidence of someone who can and will rip his throat out and honestly—

He doesn't really want his throat ripped out today, that might be a tomorrow problem.

So no, Tommy does not think he will be doing that.

Instead, he closes his eyes and stomps his foot on the ground.

He hears the crackle and feels heat on his face, he opens his eyes and Whirlpool is stumbling back holding her eyes.

Damn. Tommy really is kinda powerful, if he's being completely honest.

He looks at Whirlpool for a second longer, the damage won't be bad, just like having a slightly more aggressive torch shined in your eyes.

That means that it won't be long until Whirlpool's eyes go back to normal and she can start trying to turn Tommy into soup—

That means Tommy needs to dip—

Right, okay— cool, has to jump off the side of the building. That's something he's really super comfortable with.

Dropping off the side of the building he catches his fall at the last moment.

The alley he lands in is a mess, with bits of rubbish and stuff laying everywhere. There's someone sleeping in the corner and Tommy wants to apologise for inevitably interrupting their sleep.

Instead, he breaks out into a run.

The alleys are something that he knows he'll be able to out-school any of the heroes in, he basically grew up here. He can outrun her, he hears footsteps behind him and he risks a look over his shoulder.

Oh, great, he's being chased.

Tommy looks up ahead, there's a dumpster. And a wall, Tommy can scale that easily but he's more nervous if Whirlpool can scale it as well. She can probably come up with a way to use her powers to aid her up the wall, if that's the case then Tommy is royally, and completely, fucked.

He runs up towards the dumpster, jumping up and taking one more big step.

He puts his foot against the wall giving himself momentum, and he throws himself up in the air.

He goes soaring.

His hand snag the edge of the building and Tommy manages to scramble over the edge of it.

Okay, he's not dead at the moment—

Nevermind Whirlpool is properly committed to chasing him—

He watches as she also jumps up, soaring a lot more gracefully than he ever did— Tommy then watches as she grabs onto the side of the building. Before starting to scramble up, again with a lot more ease than Tommy did.

So... Tommy does what is probably not morally correct.

But he throws her back down to the ground.

Not with any real force, he catches her before she slams into the concrete.

Still, Shelby makes a noise as she hits the concrete and Tommy hesitates only for a few moments.

He summons his power in his hands before throwing the dumpster across the ground. It skids in a painful noise before stopping against the wall on the other side. The one with the much taller wall.

Whirlpool looks up at him, and Tommy looks down at her.

Then Whirlpool, apparently isn't impressed with this, because she launches a blob of water at him, which forms itself into an icespike and soars at Tommy.

Tommy flicks it to the side with his hand and it clatters against the floor.

Something passes between them, Tommy doesn't know how to describe it, it's not understanding— never understanding, but it is something. Whirlpool glares a little bit harsher at him, and Tommy takes a few steps back.

There's something heavy in Whirlpool's eyes and she looks at him.

"I'm sorry about Logstedchire," is what she says, tilting her head a little bit. "About the guards and the patrols— I wish I could do more. I won't forgive you what you did to Wil or Fundy, but..." she takes a few steps backwards, "Thank you."

Tommy takes a few more steps back.

Whirlpool looks at him for a few more moments, "Good luck, Theseus."

Tommy doesn't do anything, he can't think of a response even in sign, he doesn't know what to think about it. So he takes a few steps backwards, still unsure of what to do as Whirlpool looks at him with a certain weight in her eyes.

She reaches up to her ear, pressing something there and looking Tommy dead in the eyes. "Nothing on this side," she says, "Got distracted by something, that's all. We're clear here."

He turns around and breaks out into a run, throwing himself across the gap of a building, where he lands and sits down against another aircon unit.

That was... such a fucking weird interaction.

Heroes don't make any sense, one second they're throwing swords at you, and the next they're wishing you luck. This isn't really a new thing, heroes tend to contradict themselves a lot, but still, it doesn't make it any less confusing for Tommy.

He leans his head against the aircon unit.

Okay.

He's okay.

With a sigh he gets up onto his feet, his legs shake a little bit but it's nothing he can't ignore. He takes another deep breath before starting to walk again, it's dumb if he needs to run everywhere. Especially when he can walk.

Logstedchire at night has become... unnerving.

There used to be noises everywhere, parties or family gatherings or cars— there used to be life here, and there's nothing here anymore. Just an unsettling sort of quiet, it's not silent, a place will never really be silent.

But it's quiet.

Tommy doesn't like this quiet.

It settles around him and it almost suffocates, he didn't realise how *loud* Logstedchire was until now.

“Hey!” Someone yells and Tommy looks over his shoulder. “Let me go!”

Oh shit. Okay.

Tommy turns around to where the voice came from, the floor, he looks over the edge of the building.

There's a blonde girl who seems to be facing off with one of the guard, she's wearing a dark green shirt and her hair is in a low ponytail at the back of her head. Her arm is being grabbed by the guard.

This is Tommy's like— third mistake of the night.

He gets himself involved.

He told Purpled that he'd be quick, that it would be an in-and-out thing, instead he's about to fight one of the guards because some teenage girl does not seem to be a very big fan of whatever is happening.

Tommy jumps, he manages to hit the ground without slowing himself down too much and then he grabs the guard by the back of the shirt.

They make a strangled noise and Tommy looks at the teenager standing across from him with wide eyes.

She seems to get the clue because she breaks off into a run in the opposite direction— nice to see that some people in Logstedchire have the smallest amount of street sense.

The guard manages to spin around and hit Tommy in the side of the face with— a fucking baton, cool. Pain shoots through the side of his face and he stumbles back.

The guard moves forwards, raising the baton again and Tommy manages to stop it with his hand, pain shoots through his hand and Tommy resists the urge to yell, he grabs the baton and

throws his weight backwards.

Now Tommy had a baton.

Nice!

He hits the guard across the face and they make a noise and stagger backwards slightly.

Tommy kicks them in the chest and they sprawl against the ground.

He drops the baton next to their head, before looking up at the buildings. Scaling that seems too difficult, he might just throw himself up in the air. He glances around to see if any guards are about to swarm him, it doesn't seem that they are, so he takes a deep breath before throwing himself up in the air.

The way he would describe it is simple enough, he jumps up and then his powers catch him. He barely controls them when he does this, they more... know what to do, like it's some sort of muscle memory.

He lands on the top of one of the higher buildings, the ones that are going to be annoying to get up to and he pauses. Breathing for a moment— holy fuck how does Purpled do this without powers?

Tommy sits down, he needs a break.

He has a distance until he arrives at Rose's and Taylor's and can drop off the like... couple hundred dollar bills in his pocket, as a thank you, for letting him hide there— and also for stealing a good amount of their food.

It's dumb.

He's currently Logstedchire's most wanted criminal.

He could've gotten Purpled to do this.

Instead of worrying about that, he lays down on the ground glancing up at the sky.

It's dark out, and the light pollution means that only some stars can be seen, a few shimmering dots in the sky. He stares up at the stars for longer than he probably should, just watching the non-changing sky.

Now he's straight-up procrastinating.

His eyes stay on the sky a bit longer, there's not a lot to look at but there's a lot of time to think.

He hurt Fundy—

Wilbur had at least done something to him, Fundy hadn't... done anything, he was just there and in the way and a good emotional tie against Wilbur. Something that would hurt, and Tommy...

He's not sure anymore.

He's not sure about any of it. About his powers, about the fuckery he's caused by making irrational decisions. He just... doesn't know, doesn't know what to do, doesn't know what he is...

It's always this.

He just... doesn't know anymore.

Once upon a time, he knew what he knew, he knew what to do. He knew who he was and he knew he had friends and even a family, and now he just— has none of that.

He hurt Wilbur, and he still doesn't know if he regrets that or not.

He hurt Fundy, and he thinks he regrets that.

But if he could do it again would he?

And... Tommy wants to say that he wouldn't. He wants to say that if the situation happened again he would just run away, fuck off and not engage in the fight. He didn't have to fight there, he could've run— and things would have been so much simpler.

But— he thinks he'd do it again.

He thinks he'd fight Wilbur and hurt Fundy and he thinks he wouldn't run, and somehow that's more terrifying than anything else.

Tommy sits up, hugging his knees to his chest and looking out across the skyline. It's not a lot to look at, with flashing lights and cars in the distance. It's home though, and that counts for something. Buildings jut out of the ground and the further he looks the nicer they get, he can see... well a lot of L'Manberg from here. He can see at least the hero tower, the imposing figure in the sky— the reminder that they're almost always being watched by the heroes.

The skyline is nice.

It's home, and—

Tommy just doesn't know anymore.

He doesn't want to become his father, with cold eyes and so much... anger in him. He doesn't want that—

Why is he so angry?

He didn't use to be this angry, about— well anything.

He was fine with the heroes and gangs and existing in a world that never really wanted him and now he's just... so fucking angry, about it all, he hates it all.

He doesn't know.

That's the long and short of it, he doesn't know how he feels, he doesn't know who he is outside of the titles that other people put on him. He doesn't— fucking know.

He's just— so tired of it all, everything is weighing down on him. He's sick of it all, he's sick of the fighting and the emotions and just not knowing. He's so tired of not knowing anything, he used to be sure in his relationship with Tubbo— look at how that went.

It's all too much all the time.

Tommy just... is sick of this fighting, this constant arguments, not knowing anymore. This... whatever it is that threatens to drown him, his chest hurts when he breathes too deep and at this point he doesn't know what he can do anymore. He's just... tired.

He's been tired for so long.

He misses Deo.

He misses Deo so fucking much—

And somewhere within that, he starts crying.

Not a heavy cry, the type where sobs wrack from your chest.

The type of cry where you sit in your bedroom and press your hand over your mouth as tears stream from your eyes because you just— don't know what else you can do anymore. All you can do is watch as you rip yourself apart.

He presses a hand against his mouth as his eyes blur from the tears.

He— just doesn't fucking know anymore.

Tubbo is confusing, Wilbur is confusing, Elysium is confusing— Tommy doesn't know where he stands with any of these things. It's all too much all the time and he just needs it to stop, he's tired.

He needs it to stop.

He's so, so tired.

There's a noise and Tommy turns around, hand curled into a fist and looks up at the figure approaching him. It's Aurelian, thank fuck—

She looks at him, tilting her head slightly before shuffling closer to where Tommy is sitting.

She's in her usual get-up, the mask that covers the bottom half of her face. She has more of the typical vigilante-looking mask on the top of her face, the fabric that covers around her eyes and shows off her bright golden eyes.

They're probably contacts, but it's still cool.

The jumpsuit she's wearing is a staple of the Aurelian outfit, with so many pockets and gold stitching. The pants are basically several giant pockets that don't have a lot in them, as most of the things she uses regularly are on the belt that's on her waist.

She has her hood up, and walks over to Tommy, slowly.

Her boots click against the ground as she approaches before she sits down next to him.

Neither of them says anything for a long moment, they both look out at the skyline in silence. It feels like a sort of grief, and Tommy can't put his finger on it. He doesn't cry as much, but tears still happen, much to his disgust.

A few minutes pass in silence and Aurelian looks at him. "Hi," she says, her mask distorting her actual voice, making it lower than what is probably natural.

She nudges Tommy's shoulder and Tommy looks away from the spot on the skyline he's fixating on.

"You seem— more upset than usual," she says gently.

Tommy just glares at the ground a little bit more.

“You don’t have to tell me what’s wrong, I learnt sign language though, so— if you want to tell me I’ll listen— well not listen because it’s sign language,” she laughs a bit awkwardly. “I don’t imagine you have too many people you can talk to about all of this—” she gestures around them. “But if you need to talk to someone, then I’m here.”

Tommy nods.

Where the fuck can he even start—

“I worked with Elysium.” Is the first thing he signs.

“Oh,” Aurelian says, she pauses for a few moments, before leaning back on her hands and looking out at the skyline. “Well— I’m sure you could do worse things. Working with Elysium isn’t amazing, but I’m sure you had your reasons.”

Tommy nods.

“And knowing you,” Aurelian continues, her voice careful. “Then... I reckon you had a pretty good reason. You’re not a bad person, you’ve never been a bad person.”

“Doesn’t feel like it.”

“I know,” Aurelian says, and she says it in a voice that sounds more understanding than anything else. The type of tone someone can only manage if they’ve been in a situation they’re currently watching unfurl, and it’s nice... it’s nice that Tommy can know someone else has been through a similar situation and they’re okay. “And it might not, but— you’re young and— everyone makes bad decisions while they’re young.”

Tommy stifles a laugh with his hand.

“Bad enough to get Logstedchire a curfew?”

“Nah,” she says and there’s a smile in her voice. “They were always going to make a big move against Logstedchire. It was basically inevitable. They were always going to lock us down, that’s how it works. The organisations and the figureheads of Logstedchire— Elysium and the vigilantes, get too much power. They need to try and dampen those spirits.”

Tommy nods.

“Too bad that they’re too stuck up to know anything about Logstedchire,” Aurelian laughs, “Because— this has just made people mad, it’s made them less than apathetic. That was the problem, apathy, there’s no more apathy anymore.”

Tommy just hugs his legs to his chest a bit more.

Another moment of silence settles over them.

“Theseus,” she says, “You might have saved us all.”

Tommy just looks at her, screwing up his face underneath the mask.

“Well,” she says, “You’ve always given people a reason to fight, and this is no exception. They’re asking questions about why they had blue in the tower, they’re asking how Elysium could get in so easily, they’re protesting and getting out there and they’re going to change *something* I tell you that now.”

“I don’t want to be a symbol of social change,” Tommy replies. *“I just wanted to do the right thing.”*

Aurelian sighs, and it sounds like there’s something a bit sad in her voice. “I think it’s too late, I think... you’ve started something, Theseus. Something amazing, and maybe a bit terrifying, but it’s something.”

Tommy looks at Aurelian for a long moment, neither of them can see the other's eyes.

They don't know much about the other one, but Tommy does know that Aurelian is smart and she's kind in a way that she doesn't need to be.

"Theseus saved his city-state... he was also exiled from it."

Aurelian shakes her head, before leaning back even more. She lays down on the ground and her legs swing over the side of the building. "You are not the myth you were named after, please don't forget that. It's only a name, names only mean the power you give them. It's a name."

"It's my name."

"Theseus dies," Aurelian mutters, as she glances at Tommy. "You're not going to die."

Tommy pauses for a moment, before looking at Aurelian again. *"Sometimes it feels like I won't make it to seventeen."*

"Oh," and she sounds so impossibly sad, the way Techno sounds when Tommy says something worrying. Or the way that Deo used to sound when Tommy would wake up from nightmares. She just sounds... caring, and kind, like she actually cares. "You will," Aurelian says, "Alright? You'll make it to seventeen, then eighteen and then you're going to live a long life, reach all those dreams that you'll make."

Tommy nods.

"You're a kid," there's something heavy in her voice. "You don't deserve the pressure that's been put on you. You're not going to be perfect, or always make sense and you're going to contradict yourself. But you're only human, and that can't be held against you."

If Tommy starts crying again, then Aurelian doesn't say anything. She sits up and pulls Tommy into a hug.

It's a bit awkward, with Tommy's goggles pressing into her shoulder. But she doesn't say anything and just lets Tommy cry, she doesn't say a single word. Just hugging him as if she can make this go away.

"You're okay," Aurelian says, "You'll be okay, it'll work out."

Tommy cries a little bit harder at that, being careful not to make a sound.

Eventually, Tommy's tears subside, and Aurelian lets go of him. "I should go," she says, "You need to go home. Whatever you came out here to do, do it some other time. You need to go home, you need to rest, go to the people who love you, Theseus. I know there are plenty."

There aren't plenty.

It feels like that list gets smaller and smaller each day.

Instead, Tommy gets up onto his feet and looks at Aurelian who is still sitting there, swinging her legs over the edge of the building. She looks across the skyline, at the shimmering lights and the hero tower and everything else that is on the skyline.

Aurelian after a few moments looks away from the buildings and lights that they call home, and up at Tommy. "Go home, Theseus," she says gently, "I know there are people who care about you, and I know they can't risk losing you."

Tommy tilts his head slightly.

“Thank you.” He signs, and Aurelian smiles under her mouth, considering the way her mask lifts up a little. *“See you around?”*

“Always,” Aurelian says, “See you when I see you.”

And Tommy turns around, walking to the other side of the building before launching himself over one of the gaps.

He grabs onto the side of the building, having overshot his jump and he scrambles up again, laughing at himself as he does so. He looks over to where Aurelian is still sitting before giving a little wave.

She laughs and waves back.

Tommy grins to himself as he turns around and walks off, he’s gonna go home— and he’s gonna have a sleep, he needs to sleep more anyway, and then he’s going to try sort through the mess of his emotions.

It’s quiet as Tommy walks. He doesn’t run because he’s not running away from anything. The buildings are nice, and Tommy takes his time for once. Looking at everything around him, he’s been through this area thousands of times, but for once he lets himself notice everything.

The plant on the top of the building here, and the cat curled into a ball on the next one. It’s just... nice.

The night wind is cool on his face, which is lovely because L’Manberg is fucking in the middle of Summer and he might boil to death if he’s not careful. It’s nice against his face and in his hair, it’s quiet— and he hates that a little, but there’s something nice about being able to focus on the far away beeping of a car, or talking from out the back of someone’s house.

Peace and quiet.

He hops over the gap of another building, landing a bit awkwardly on the

He's gonna go home, probably shower, then he's gonna eat too much junk food and go to sleep. He deserves it— he doesn't know why he deserves it, but he does.

“Theseus!” Someone yells and Tommy turns around.

He gets knocked into the floor and his head smacks against the back of the concrete— he really needs to get better at tucking in his head— pain bursts through the back of Tommy's head and his eyes won't focus as he tries to see his attacker—

Green.

It's Dream.

Oh shit, it's Dream.

Oh, fucking shit it's Dream.

Tommy is only vaguely aware of this as his head gets snapped to the side from a punch, and he throws up both of his arms to try and stop his head from being attacked. Instead, he gets hit in the arms.

Fuck. Shit.

Shit, fuck— one might say.

Tommy throws both of his arms up and Dream goes flying back, he skids across the ground and it sounds painful.

He scrambles up on his feet before looking at Dream, and taking a few more steps backwards — he doesn't want to have this fight, please don't make him have this fight— he moves back even more.

“Theseus,” Dream says, and unlike Wilbur, his tone hasn't changed to how it normally is, he just looks at Tommy. “I have to bring you in—” he pauses for a moment, “I'm sorry.”

Tommy shakes his head.

Then he drops off the side of the building.

He manages to grab onto the railing of a fire escape which is conveniently on the side of the building, he hauls himself up onto the actual platform and looks around for a moment— okay he needs some sort of plan.

Get onto the ground.

That would be the start of an amazing plan.

So Tommy launches himself off of the fire escape, twisting in the air and landing on the ground.

He barely stop his momentum and feels that as he slams into the ground, knocking all the air out of his lungs and wheezing as he tries to gain his breath back. He looks up to the edge of the building, where Dream is standing.

Tommy knows he has to get up and start running.

He just... doesn't think he has that energy.

Then as Dream jumps off the building, Tommy realises that— yes, he does have the energy to do that.

Scrambling onto his feet Tommy stumbles backwards, almost tripping over his own feet as he watches Dream use the outside railing of the fire escape like a ladder and climb down much faster than Tommy can run.

Well, Tommy starts running anyway, sprinting across the street, there are no cars he needs to worry about. He looks over his shoulder and— yup he's being pursued. Tommy uses this knowledge to run a little bit faster down the street.

He dodges out of the way of street lamps rather successfully, not hitting anything as he runs. Dream struggles a bit more, having to jump over things littering the streets. Tommy— thinks he has never run as fast as he's running right now.

His lungs ache from the cold air and the sprinting, his chest hurts as well and his throat feels raw. But he keeps running because he doesn't know what he can do if he gets caught, what he actually needs to do is get up high—

High—

Ignoring the obvious joke there, he looks around... for anything he can help use to get up. Yeah— he could just use his powers but—

Those footsteps are concerningly close.

Tommy risks a look over his shoulder and, sure enough, Dream is basically on his tail.

This makes Tommy yell and he jumps up. His powers seem to know what they do because they catch him in the air and propel him much higher.

He goes soaring towards one of the buildings, and Tommy basically curls up as he hits the ground. He skids along the ground, feeling bits of his hoodie tear and skin come off his elbows as he skids backwards.

Everything hurts, and Tommy stands back up.

He keeps running, and he hears footsteps land on the roof and some heavy breathing.

How the fuck is Dream keeping up with him—

Not even fucking Purpled can keep up with him when Tommy has to *leave*.

Tommy looks over his shoulder as he crosses another gap and Dream is behind him. There's more distance for sure, but not enough for Tommy's liking.

He keeps running.

His calves hurt like nothing else, he can barely think as he runs ahead, his feet slam into the ground and his chest aches from the lack of oxygen and also the cold air— maybe, he doesn't really know how lungs work, but that makes enough sense to him.

Dream is right behind him.

Tommy keeps running.

Every step hurts, and he knows that he's slowing down. He keeps running, even if he's aware of Dream catching up with him. He's only a few metres behind now, Tommy can hear both of their laboured breathing.

There's another gap, a larger one than usual, a main road is in the middle and Tommy takes a deep breath.

He throws himself across the gap, powers aiding him.

An arm wraps around him and Tommy flails, throwing both his hands out in front of him.

He manages to twist so Dream takes the brunt on the damage as they hit the roof and he wheezes for breath as Tommy gets up onto his feet and starts going to run.

A hand wraps around his ankle and Tommy hits the ground.

He turns so he's on his back as Dream attempts to hit him with his staff, Tommy moves his head out of the way and the staff strikes the concrete with a lot of force.

Tommy reaches up for the staff, grabbing it as tightly as he can and twisting it. Dream makes a noise and lets go of the staff, Tommy takes this as a chance to hit him in the knee with it.

Dream barely flinches, before grabbing a fucking... sword.

Cool. The stakes are a bit higher.

Dream swings the sword and Tommy holds the staff up. The sword basically bounces off of it and Dream takes a step back.

This lets Tommy scramble onto his feet and he takes a few steps back, keeping the distance between Dream and himself. Dream looks at him for a moment, before taking a few striding steps and closing the distance.

Dream swings, right at Tommy's head—

Oh, fuck, it's serious.

Tommy jumps back, out of the way and his heart jumps in his throat.

He doesn't want to hurt Dream— he doesn't want to hurt anyone else, he's tired of hurting people. Dream swings again and Tommy deflects it with the end of the staff, which chips off with a loud resounding noise.

Right.

Okay.

It's been so long since Tommy's had a fight where his life might actually be on the line.

He ducks out of the way of another spin, then Dream manages to do a backhand sorta thing—and the sword goes swiping directly at his face.

Tommy throws up a hand and the sword stops a few centimetres before his hand.

Dream makes a confused noise.

Tommy throws the weight of the sword backwards, and Dream goes with it, toppling backwards and Tommy turns around to start running.

He throws the staff off the side of the building and keeps running.

Instead, he gets knocked to the ground again.

This time there's a sword held against his throat and Tommy stares up at Dream with wide eyes as he holds the sword against his throat.

Both of them breathe for while, staring at each other.

“Just hand yourself in,” Dream says, “Please— it's so much easier for me, I don't want to hurt you. Just give up— I have too much relying on your capture.”

Funnily enough, Tommy has his freedom on the line for this.

Tommy shakes his head.

Dream moves back a little bit like he wasn't expecting this response. He reaches up to the earpiece that all the heroes have, pressing down on it.

Tommy moves one of his hands up, not so it's touching the edge of the sword, but it's close to touching it.

“Theseus has basically been apprehended,” Dream says, looking down at Tommy. “I am currently fighting him, it's not looking great for him—”

With a deep breath he knows what he has to do, he rests his palm against the bottom of it, before throwing his arm up.

Sure enough, the sword moves away from his throat, and with his other hand, he throws Dream backwards.

He lets go of the sword and Tommy manages to grab it by the hilt. It's heavier than he thought it would be. He gets back onto his feet and stumbles forwards by the sheer weight of the sword.

How the fuck does Dream hold this like it's nothing—

Tommy swings the sword upwards and points it generally in Dream's direction, holding onto it with both hands and Dream just looks at him.

"That's not how you hold it," there's a certain level of fondness in his voice, Tommy can't see his expression because of the smiley-face mask, but he can hear the smile in Dream's voice. "Has no one ever taught you how to use a sword?"

It isn't exactly in the vigilante handbook, so no.

Dream sighs, "Okay, so you want your dominant hand to be way closer to the hilt, and your non-dominant hand to be near the end. That means you can swing easier."

Tommy reluctantly changes his grip.

Dream is right, it does make it significantly easier.

He glares behind the mask and goggles.

"Okay," Dream says, "Sorry about this."

He basically leaps up into the air, twisting and then landing behind Tommy. He grabs the hood and pulls him backwards by it. Tommy makes a noise, and both of his hands dart up to his hoodie to try and pull it away from his throat.

The sword clatters onto the concrete.

Dream manages to kick it up with his foot, and catch it with his hand not yanking Tommy backwards by the hoodie.

Tommy breaks Dream's grip on the back of his hood.

The hood is resting on his shoulder now, it's no longer pinned to the top part of his goggles. Meaning that— technically this is the first proper sighting of Theseus's hair. Dream looks at him for a long moment, tilting his head.

Tommy swings a punch at Dream, and in his seemingly moment of shock it hits. Dream's head snaps to the side and Tommy goes for another hit. This one also hits and Dream stumbles backwards.

"The fuck," he mutters.

And Tommy decides he's had enough of this fight, because he runs towards the other side of the building, going to throw himself over the edge of it. Maybe hit the ground, and start that whole chasing arc again.

Dream seems to know what he's doing because he manages to get a grip on Tommy's hoodie at the last possible second, and Tommy is pulled back from jumping off of the edge.

Tommy manages to twist around so he's facing Dream, breathing heavily as his toes just reach the side of the building.

It seems that Dream has no intention to bring him onto solid ground, instead, he can barely touch the ground. They're up high— if Dream lets go, Tommy won't die, he'll catch himself — but he'll fall.

He hates falling.

“Theseus,” Dream says, reaching to his side, “You are under arrest for vigilantism—”

Someone knocks into Dream's side.

Tommy starts falling, he goes to scream but someone grabs Tommy's hand and hauls him back up onto the building.

“I got you,” Aurelian says looking at him for a long moment before grabbing his shoulders. “Are you alright?”

Tommy nods wordlessly.

“Aurelian!” Dream yells, “Fancy seeing you here.”

“Fuck off,” Aurelian sighs.

Then Aurelian runs forwards and Tommy stands there for a moment, just trying to breathe. His heart is beating impossibly fast, he almost fell— he almost fell— he would've fallen and he can't control his falling, not really.

Aurelian ducks out of the way of one of Dream's swings, and she manages to twist so she hits Dream in the face.

Tommy figures he should probably join in this fight. It feels a bit rude to let someone else do

the work in what is essentially his fight.

He moves forwards, swinging at Dream who ducks out of the way and then punches Aurelian in the face. She staggers back a little, holding the side of her face.

Tommy manages to grab the back of Dream's poncho thing he wears and yanks him backwards. Dream twists around and grabs Tommy by the chin. Before managing to drag both of them to the ground.

Then one of Tommy's wrists has something on it, and his head feels dizzy—

He looks down at his left wrist—

It's one of the fucking power suppressing cuffs.

His vision goes blurry for a second and he can't think of much— it's just all fuzz in his head. What the fuck—

Aurelian kicks Dream in the side of the head and he goes down like a sack of potatoes. Hitting the ground with a thump, he gets up almost straight away and Tommy shuffles back as much as he can.

He watches the power cuff over his wrist, he knows what it's doing is injecting some sorta drug into his system— he watched Sam explain how it works, reverse engineered blue—which is currently in his system and making his head fuzzy. Black dots fill his vision and he can't hold his own weight up.

He flops against the ground.

It's comfortable here.

His head is all spiny and good, no more rude thoughts. The stars look nice— he looks at them. “Woah,” he mutters, “Cool!” He looks around, Aurelian and Dream are fighting again, and neither of them are winning.

Both of them are kinda blurry and Tommy can only tell who is who based on their colours, the colour green versus the colour black. And it appears neither of them are winning.

His head keeps spinning.

He needs the power suppressor off— he looks down at it, before trying to pull it off. That shoots pain up his entire arm and Tommy makes a small noise, it hurts— he doesn’t want it to hurt—

He’s sick of being in pain.

“Theseus?” Aurelian calls out, “A little help here?”

Tommy is pretty sure he’s about to pass out or something, but he gets to his feet and watches Aurelian and Dream for a few moment. Both of them fight really prettily, unlike people like... Techno or Tommy.

They fight like they’re dancing, with neat footwork and brutal jabs.

It looks very pretty—

Is this what being high is like?

Is Tommy high right now?

Tommy manages a few steps over before a swarm of dizziness gets him and he holds onto the side of... something, he doesn't really know what— his entire head spins and he decides now is the time to stop having thoughts.

So he stops having thoughts.

“Theseus!” Aurelian yells, rudely interrupting his plan for no thoughts. She looks up at him. Then at his left wrist, then at Dream. “The fuck did you do to him?” She swings at him, something slightly more brutal in her fighting.

More hits land and Dream staggers backwards from all the hits.

Tommy grabs onto the wall more.

The fuzziness in his head is starting to wash away, and his vision is far less blurry now.

He stands up straighter, holding himself for a few moments, before lunging at Dream and hitting him across the face with the hand that's in the power suppressor.

Apparently, that works because Dream staggers backwards.

Tommy's head spins again and he grabs onto Aurelian's arm to keep him upright.

She seems to be concerned and moves in front of Tommy.

She takes another hit for Tommy, this time the hilt of the sword is knocked into her forehead.

Aurelian stumbles back into Tommy and become generally unsteady on her feet.

Tommy grabs her, so she doesn't go plummeting off the side of the building.

"Oh, shit," Aurelian mutters, looking up at Tommy. "That's not great—"

"Sit down," Tommy helps her to the ground. "I'll handle this."

"I'm good— I'm good," Aurelian tries to get back up again and Tommy puts his hand on her shoulder. "I'm good—"

"You're not—" Tommy turns around and ducks out of one of Dream's punches, he manages to duck underneath his arm and then body tackle him.

They both go rolling across the ground, and somehow Dream ends up with the upper hand and punches Tommy in the side of the head.

How much fucking brain damage will he gain by the end of the day— because at the moment it really feels like a real fucking lot of brain damage. He holds the side of his head and Dream goes for another punch.

He manages to throw one of his arms up, blocking that attempt, but pain shoots through his arm and Tommy tries to twist away from Dream. But he can't, he's basically stuck on the floor.

Dream swings again, and Tommy throws up his left hand, attempting to throw him off.

However, minor detail— his left hand currently has a power suppressor on it. Something that — means his powers will not work, even if he wants them to.

Nothing happens, and Dream laughs.

He doesn't laugh when Tommy throws him off using his other arm and he hits the ground in a way that sounds painful.

Standing up, Tommy holds his right arm out, looking at Dream before doing a density shift—

He can hear when exactly Dream feels it change because the concrete around him cracks and Dream makes a noise. He grabs onto his rib, like that will change anything. Tommy doesn't push anymore, just holding Dream there.

Dream tries to sit up, or move— or do anything, but he can't.

Tommy slowly walks over to Aurelian who is still sitting down, holding the side of her head. She looks up at Tommy and laughs, "Ouch."

"Go home."

"I'm fine," Aurelian says, and finally Tommy has found someone who matches his ability to lie and say he's fine. "Just gotta— walk it off," she mutters, before managing to stand up.

Tommy turns back to Dream, who is still pinned to the floor.

He moves his arm back and Dream gets onto his feet.

"You, fucker—" Dream says, he takes a deep breath before looking at Tommy.

Tommy just stares at him.

Then Dream starts running, and Tommy is too confused to move out of the way. Aurelian makes a noise, and Tommy is thrown back.

Over the side of a building—

Both of them.

This feels strangely familiar.

He throws out his right hand, reaching it down towards the ground and praying that'll be enough to stop his momentum.

His stomach drops as they plummet towards the ground. He throws out his hand as he goes diving toward the ground even more, and he closes his eyes.

He hits the ground, with enough force that it hurts but not so badly that he's going to be permanently damaged. He looks up at Dream, who goes for a swing, but Tommy throws his left arm up.

Dream punches the metal of the cuff and yells out in pain, holding his hand.

Tommy reaches up with his other hand, before Dream grabs that and basically stands on his wrist. It's not painful, but it does mean that he can't— fucking move his hand. He's actually pinned.

He's going to actually get arrested—

Shit—

Dream looks at him, before reaching for the mask.

“No!” Tommy yells.

Dream rips the mask off his face.

They both stare at each other, Dream moves his own mask up and stares at Tommy with wide eyes. “Tommy?” Dream whispers, “No, no— no it wasn’t supposed to be you. No— no—”

Tommy can’t breathe— he can’t fucking breathe, his chest feels tight and he can’t breathe.

Dream knows— he knows.

“You—” Dream says, “You— holy shit.”

Tommy pushes Dream off of him, scrambling so his back is against the wall.

He looks at Dream with wide eyes, he still has the goggles on, but it barely matters at this point because Dream knows—

Dream’s eyes are about as wide as Tommy’s, he moves back slightly, still crouched on the ground and looking like he’s having just about the worst day of his life. “No— it was supposed to be Daniel or— or someone you knew, not *you* . Why is it you?”

Tommy shakes his head rapidly, “You— don’t tell anyone—”

“I—” Dream says, “What the fuck Tommy? What the— what the fuck, no, no, no,” he stands up and starts pacing up and down, “It’s not supposed to— no. What the fuck— it’s been you? This entire time?”

He can’t breathe—

His lungs aren’t fucking working, the air isn’t enough— he can’t— he can’t breathe, Dream knows and he knows everything Tommy’s done and he’s going to tell everyone and Tommy can’t deal with that.

Everyone’s gonna know, Wilbur’s gonna know, Phil’s gonna know— fucking hell even Sam is going to know and Tommy can’t— he can’t do this.

Everyone’s gonna know and he can’t— that’s not— he can’t do this, he can’t do this— Dream knows and everyone’s gonna know and Dream— Dream was supposed to arrest him and he still might arrest him and Tommy probably deserves it in the first place— he can’t— do this—

“Tommy— you need the breathe— it’s okay—”

And he reaches forwards.

Tommy flinches back, bringing both of his hands up to protect his face and turning his head to the side. He can’t breathe— or think, because Dream knows. Dream knows and Tommy can’t— he doesn’t know what he can do.

Nothing happens for a moment.

Tommy looks back at Dream.

His eyes are glowing red.

“No, no, no—” Tommy shakes his head, before moving towards Dream and putting his hands on his shoulders. “Dream— Dream— no, no, I didn’t— I didn’t mean to, I— I didn’t— I’m sorry, I didn’t—” he can’t fucking breathe, he can’t— he’s not breathing right. His lungs are tight and he can’t think, his throat is closing up and his lungs hurt. “I didn’t mean to— I’m, fuck!”

There’s footsteps next to him and Aurelian stands next to him.

“Tommy?” She whispers.

“Huh?” Tommy says breathlessly, “I didn’t— I didn’t mean to, please, believe me, I didn’t mean to— I don’t know how to— I can’t fix this. I didn’t mean to.”

Aurelian rips off her own mask and looks at Tommy.

It’s Niki—

What the fuck—

“Niki?” Tommy whispers, and Niki nods, she gets on the floor looking at Dream as well. His entire eyes are glowing an eerie sort of red and Tommy— doesn’t fucking know what to do. He’s only a kid.

What the fuck *can* he do?

“Niki—” Tommy whispers, “I— I don’t know how to fix this, I can’t— I have to calm down and I can’t calm down because— everyone’s gonna say I did this on purpose. I didn’t— I didn’t mean to, I never mean to— and I can’t— can’t fucking breathe.”

“Hey, hey, hey,” Niki says, as gentle as ever. She grabs Tommy by the shoulders and makes him look at her. “It’s okay— you’re okay, alright? We can figure this out. We can do this, you just need to— calm down, I know it’s not that easy. But take some deep breaths, we’ll figure out what to do—”

“He’s gonna tell everyone,” Tommy manages between laboured breaths, “He’s gonna tell Wil and Phil and Sam and everyone and you already know what a shit person I am and— you might turn me in, apparently the reward’s good and I don’t— I’m such an idiot and—”

“You’re okay, you’re okay,” Niki says, “Okay? I’m not going to tell anyone, Dream’s not going to either. Your secret is safe. You’re safe. Alright?”

“I’m not— I’m not— it’s not— I didn’t mean to, please— I didn’t mean to, I didn’t know. I’m sorry, I’m sorry—”

Niki opens her mouth to say something.

“Where the fuck is he?” Someone says and Tommy recognises that as Whirlpool. His eyes shoot wide and Niki shakes her head.

Wordlessly, she grabs her mask and puts it around Tommy’s face. Clipping it at the back, before glancing up.

“Niki—”

Niki brings his hood up over his head.

“I’ll grab Dream’s mask,” Niki whispers, she looks up again to where Whirlpool is walking, her steps are remarkably quiet and that is somehow more unnerving. “You need to run.”

“Huh?”

“Run,” Niki says, “You need to go— Tommy, you need to go. Run, do not stop until you get home. You need to go.”

Tommy stares at her.

Niki reaches for Dream’s mask which is on the ground and clips it over her own face. She puts up her hood and looks at Tommy.

“Hey!” Whirlpool yells from above them. “What are you doing—”

Tommy grabs onto Niki’s arm, “I didn’t— I didn’t mean to, okay? Please— please believe me, I didn’t mean to. I didn’t—”

“I know,” Niki says softly, “Now go!” And she shoves him slightly, it doesn’t hurt at all, it does snap Tommy out of whatever trance he’s in.

His eyes land on Dream again, whose eyes are still glowing red and Tommy’s chest closes a little bit. His ribs hurt and it gets so much harder to breathe again, he looks at Niki with wide eyes that she can’t see.

Whirlpool lands in front of them, her eyes land on Dream then back on Tommy. “The fuck did you do—”

Niki is the one who basically jumps at her, grabbing her and dragging both of them to the ground. “Go!” Niki yells over her shoulder, and for that, she gets punched in the face. “I’ll be fine, go!”

And Tommy is a coward— so he starts running.

Niki's mask is harder to breathe through than his own, and he struggles because of it. He throws himself up onto the roof and he just... runs.

His feet slam against the concrete and he tries to not let himself have too many thoughts, it fails spectacularly, and he runs as fast as he can. There's no one behind him, he still runs like Dream is chasing him again.

What if Dream tells everyone— Niki can't promise that he won't tell anyone. What if Wilbur finds out— what the fuck will Wilbur do if he finds out? Will he hurt Tommy? Is he just going to yell— he doesn't know anymore— he just can't bet on Wil's reactions.

He keeps running.

His heart is thumping and he can feel his breath in his throat, it all hurts— is the best way to describe it. He can't hear anything apart from his breath and his heart which is going incredibly fast— maybe from the anxiety and the fact that he's sprinting.

He checks over his shoulder, nothing—

Nothing, he's fine— he's fine— he's safe.

What if Wilbur finds out—

What if Phil finds out—

Tommy keeps running, trying to ignore how fast his heart is beating and the thoughts that swarm through his head, none of them are good— he keeps running because if he stops someone might grab him. He might get arrested and then Purpled, Techno, Tubbo and Ranboo are in trouble— so's Niki probably—

Shit.

Shit!

Wilbur's gonna find out about this, he's gonna think Tommy did it on purpose. That he meant to do this, he didn't— he didn't mean this, he didn't— he never meant for any of this to happen.

He didn't— mean this. He never meant for any of this and—

His house is up ahead.

Okay, he'll have to calm down. He needs to calm down so he stops hurting Dream, he can do that. Purpled can just knock him out— that'll calm down his heart rate and his breathing and then it'll be okay.

Bad said that he has to calm down.

Purpled helps calm him down.

It'll be fine, it'll be okay— Dream will be okay. It'll be like nothing happened! Everything will be fine, it'll be— okay, it'll— yeah it'll be fine. It'll be okay— yeah.

He launches himself across the familiar gap, grabbing onto the window sill and getting in through the window. He steps on his bed and breathes heavily.

Where's Purpled—

He walks out into the kitchen area.

Purpled is sitting on the couch with a bowl of some sort of pasta, he looks peaceful, like he's actually having a relaxing time for once in his life. And somehow that almost makes Tommy turn around and figure out how to do this alone.

Instead, Purpled looks up from the TV and looks at Tommy.

"That's not your mask," he puts his pasta down. "Tommy— what the fuck?"

"Knock me out!" Tommy yells, his breathing is still uneven and everything still hurts his throat and chest but it's enough that he can get words out. "Purpled I need you to knock me out—"

"What?" Purpled looks at him, "You're not making any sense, Tommy. What do you mean I need to knock you out."

"I mind-limboed Dream," Tommy says and his throat feels like it's closing up again, his vision goes blurry and he doesn't know if it's tears or something else he doesn't want to deal with. "I fucking— I hurt him, I didn't— I didn't mean to, I didn't mean to and I need to calm down and I can't calm down and I need you to knock me out."

"No?" Purpled stands up, "I'm not gonna knock you out?"

"Please," Tommy says and his voice breaks, "I need to— I need to calm down, I can't fucking calm down. And I need to— calm down and please— strangles are painless right? You just block off the blood to the brain— it can be like a ten-second thing—"

"That can do permanent damage, Tommy," Purpled says evenly, "Sit down."

"Purpled!" Tommy yells, "Please— just— just fucking— it'll be fine."

“It won’t be,” Purpled keeps his voice even and Tommy would find it comforting if Dream didn’t depend on this one thing. “Tommy, I’m not going to hurt you. I don’t care if you tell me to, I’m not going to fucking hurt you—”

“It won’t hurt!” Tommy yells, “Please just— please, Purpled, please—”

“No!” Purpled yells back and Tommy flinches back, “I’m not hurting you. Sit down, we’re dealing with this like normal people for fucks sake. You’re fine, just sit down— no one’s gonna hurt you, I’m sure as fuck not, and take off your mask.”

Tommy nods, his breath still uneven and he sits down taking off the mask and goggles. His stomach is doing somersaults and he can’t focus— he feels sick, he can’t do this— he can’t fucking do this.

Purpled sits down in front of him. “Okay, what happened?”

“I— he took off my mask and I panicked— I was— I just talked to Aurelian and— and then I was going home and he jumped me. And then— then he— he took off my mask and then he — he reached forwards and I got— I got scared and I—”

“Breathe, breathe,” Purpled says, “Breathe. Okay— if you pass out I am going to be so upset. Breathe, okay— breathe, deep breaths or whatever Techno would say. You’re fine.”

“I can’t—” Tommy shakes his head.

His chest has closed up, it feels like his ribs are crushing his lungs— he can’t— he can’t fucking do this. His breathing isn’t working, his ribs can’t— they’re crushing in on his lungs. He can’t breathe.

Purpled grabs his shoulder, “Breathe you fucking idiot, okay— you’re okay. It’ll be fine.”

Tommy shakes his head, he tries to say something but all he manages is a strangled sob that rips itself from his throat. He can't— he can't do this, he shakes his head and Purpled gives him a long-expression.

Tommy can't do this— he can't—

Dream knows and he can't calm down and everything is going wrong and everything is going *so* wrong and he can't fucking do this anymore. He can't— he can't— he doesn't know what he's doing—

“You're okay,” Purpled says, and Purpled is being the shittiest comforter right now, it's almost funny. But he's here, and that counts for everything. He's just... here, and Tommy needs that.

He can't breathe but Purpled is here and that makes it suck like— only a little bit less.

He can't— his throat feels too small, and no matter how much he breathes it doesn't feel like enough, he can't get in enough air— it hurts. His chest hurts and his vision is blurry, there are black dots and it's all swimming.

Everything hurts. It hurts, he can't— there's too much going on and he doesn't know how to fix any of it, it's all too much— he can't fix him being Theseus or whatever is happening with Tubbo and he can't fix his relationship with Wilbur if he finds out he's Theseus and he can't do this anymore.

Purpled puts his hand on Tommy's shoulder, not quite snapping him out of his spiral but stopping him from spiralling further.

“Breathe,” Purpled says, “We'll figure this out, me and you, okay, just breathe—” Purpled does an overexaggerated breath and Tommy tries to copy but his chest shudders part of the way through and he makes another noise that rips itself from the back of his throat.

Tommy— truthfully has no idea how long they sit there, he has no clue how long it is as Purpled tries to help him breathe, sometimes they make progress and Tommy will break out into sobs again and his chest will tighten and he'll start muttering things he can't remember and trying to speak and he'll just break again.

He can't— he can't do most of this, he doesn't know how to do this— but Purpled is here and that counts for something, it has to.

It takes... what must be hours, hours of shuddering breaths and light heads and words that don't come out right because he can barely breathe and his lungs barely work.

Purpled is just there.

For hours, steadily going through the motions, breathing in and out and Purpled nods and makes fun of him in the way that only Purpled can. It's funny almost, if Tommy was breathing better then he'd tell Purpled that, but at that moment he's not breathing amazingly.

Eventually, Tommy's breathing evens out, and it sounds like it's going to stay evened out, even if he takes a breath too deep his entire chest will shake and for a moment he'll almost start panicking again.

He seems steady for a moment and Purpled sighs, leaning against the back of the couch, leaning his head back so he's looking up at the roof. Tommy almost apologises but the second he opens his mouth Purpled seems to just *know* what he's going to say and Tommy falls silent again.

His phone buzzes and Tommy grabs it off the dining table before picking it up and holding it against his ear, not even looking at who it is.

“Yeah?”

“*Open your fucking door,*” Techno snaps and Tommy's stomach drops.

He walks over to the door and opens it.

Techno stands there, he doesn't look impressed.

“Thomas Underscore you are under arrest—”

And Tommy knows Techno is fucking arresting him— he knows that— but he also knows that he needs a Techno hug really badly, and he flings his arms around Techno's torso and hugs him tightly.

Techno seems taken aback for a moment because he pauses, he hesitates for a few moments before wrapping his arms around Tommy.

And— something about it being Techno, not Purpled makes him break. He starts crying, he— really starts crying, holding onto Techno and burying his face trying to not be so fucking loud.

“I didn't— I didn't mean to,” Tommy says through hiccuping sobs, “I didn't— I thought I could control it, I can't— I'm dangerous and I can't fucking— I can't control my powers and I'm sorry! I thought I could and I— I can't and— please believe me, I didn't mean to—”

Techno hugs him.

Tommy cries into his shoulder.

He didn't mean to—

Everything's spiralled out of control too quickly, he doesn't know what to do—

He just— doesn't know.

He doesn't know what to do anymore.

He just— doesn't know.

He doesn't know what to do anymore.

A steady pause, and Tommy lets go of Techno.

He steadies his breathing, before taking a step back and wiping his eyes with the back of his hands. Tommy refuses to let himself cry while this happens.

Another moment of a heavy silence.

Then Tommy sighs.

He holds out his wrists, "Fuckin' get it over and done with."

Chapter End Notes

Chapter Summary:

- Tommy tries to go thank Rose & Taylor (the two people from Logstedchire that helped him last chapter.) On the way, he gets into a fight with: Shelby Shubble, aka, Whirlpool who ends up letting him go and one of the guards enforcing the curfew around Logstedchire
- He has a chat with vigilante Aurelian (Niki) and that's fun!
- He heads off to go home and Dream jumps him

- They run about the city for a bit, Dream teaches Tommy how to hold a long sword along the way.
- Dream tries to arrest Tommy and NIKI MY BELOVED SHOWS UP AND BODIES HIM, IT'S GREAT A 10/10 MOMENT FOR ME
- More fighting & Dream yeets both Theseus and himself off a building and onto the ground. Dream gets Tommy basically pinned and rips off the mask and OH SHIT IT'S TOMMY! Neither of them takes that very well.
- Dream moves too quickly towards Tommy and he mind-limbs Dream, which he does NOT cope with well, and Niki is like "UM KING YOU GOTTA GO" and also rips off her mask so now Tommy knows she's Aurelian, ANYWAY TOMMY RUNS.
- VINE BOOM
- He has a big panic attack and Purpled helps him through it, canonically it takes about three hours for Purpled to calm him down (THAT IS SIGNIFICANT FOR NEXT CHAPTER)
- Techno also shows up and is all like "TOMMY YOU ARE UNDER ARREST" and Tommy cries about it, because he's sad about the entire thing.
- and the chapter ends with Tommy holding out both wrists, AND WE DUNNO IF HE GOT ARRESTED OR NOT! WOOOO CLIFFHANGERS!!!

Hello folks, this is the end of the big TINAAOS update spree I've done! And now we're gonna sit down and set some boundaries.

I am going on break. Fr this time. I have exams to worry about and TINAAOS actually takes a bit of brain power to write, I will probably be finishing off another thing i started ages ago and getting some work done on my band au. I won't stop writing, but unlike the other times I am genuinely having a break from tinaaos because I have been going flat out since about June this year and I need a break from it.

The next update, unless I procrastinate studying really hard, should be late November/early December. Fuck off, let me live, my entire life does not revolve around this story

Oh Look, a (Semi) Stable Adult, it's Niki!!!

Chapter Summary

“You did some bad things, but I'm the worst of them,” Aimsey sings dramatically into the spoon.

Niki looks back down, smiling slightly, she starts to crack the eggs into the bowl.

“Niki sing with me!” Aimsey yells, taking the spoon away from his face for a moment.

“I can't sing—”

She is cut off by Aimsey and Taylor Swift

or, let's have a break from tommy's clear mental breakdowns he is having, and the complete and utter political outfall of his actions, and instead have some niki, aimsey, techno and floof content. in which nothing goes wrong for any of the characters, at any point!!!

Chapter Notes

Hi, I am addressing something before we get started.

I am not longer comfortable writing tinaaos!dream, especially in a sympathetic light that was planned for him. If you know why, then you know, and if you don't, don't ask in my comments.

You don't have to necessarily agree with this decision, but you do have to respect it. This is my story, I'm doing it the way I want to. And if you can't acknowledge that I don't want you reading my stories anyway.

Guide to Names:

Aurelian - Niki!!!

Melicertes - Foolish

Whirlpool - Shelby Shubble (my love)

Cidae - Antfrost

Fun fact: Cidae comes from the scientific name for an ant, which is Formicidae and I thought my pun was really funny and i kept with it

Also, Aimsey uses multiple pronouns in this chapter, she/he/they/star/xe However, in the future if they're in a conversation with multiple people, I'll probably stick to one set. Peace and love, enjoy the haloduo content <3

Warnings: non-consensual drug use and those effects, guns, knives, weapons, super minor injury and once again we are dealing with corrupt authority and systematic problems, so be mindful of that.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Niki likes to think of herself as a mellow person, someone who is a calm individual and someone who doesn't act out of line unless needed. She has a cute dog, and a great bakery business she built herself, buying it off her old boss at eighteen. She also has a great field hockey club and is getting back into dancing again, and is also a vigilante—

However, she is not calm.

She throws herself to the side, punching Whirlpool in the face.

After a moment, she rolls over her shoulder, up onto her feet.

Only a moment of hesitation, before she's throwing herself at Melicertes and manages to wrap an arm around his neck and make him slam into the ground.

From behind her, Whirlpool picks up one of the power cuffs— left on the floor, Tommy has the other one around his wrist currently.

She manages to grab Niki and slam her into the ground, keeping her wrist pinned to the floor and slamming the power cuff onto her right wrist.

Her head spins from the contact and she fights down the urge to vomit.

With great difficulty, Niki manages to kick a leg up, hitting Whirlpool in the back of the head. Which makes her stumble back, she takes this chance to hit Whirlpool in the knee and she falls to the ground.

Niki rolls onto her stomach, finding her way onto her feet again and reaching for a rubbish bin. She grabs the lid, throwing it at Melicertes with ease, it hits him in the face and he stumbles. She looks over her shoulder.

Another one—

Why the fuck do they have so many heroes that can come to beat the shit out of her?

Niki only vaguely recognises this one, Cidae, some sort of feline hybrid with sharp claws and a power she can not remember. She sighs, picking up one of the old palettes leaning against the wall and throwing it at the figure at the end of the alley.

She doesn't want to risk using her powers, especially with the power cuff.

Her head spins.

She's going to pass out soon, she can feel it coming on already—

Something slams into her back, and Niki whirls around, kicking Melicertes in the chest, before picking up the closest thing at her side, a metal thing, and hitting him across the head with it.

Melicertes goes down.

Niki whirls around, facing Whirlpool and Cidae.

She points the metal bar at them, giving them a chance to leave if they so desire.

Neither of them takes that offer because they're heroes—

Whirlpool swings at her first, Niki swings the bar at the outreached arm and she cries out holding her arm and stumbling back. She grabs her forearm again, but Niki swings at Cidae.

Ciade ducks under it, managing to grab the bar and twist it out of Niki's grasp, it clatters against the ground and Niki just goes for a roundhouse kick.

However, Ciade appears to be slightly more skilled than she thought because he grabs her leg and yanks her sideways.

Niki crashes into the wall, but she manages to stay upright and vaguely she's aware of the potential cut on the back of her head, and the power cuff— and she is going to pass out once the adrenaline wears off.

Ouch.

She grabs the next closest thing to her, a beer bottle, and throws that at the wall on the other side of the alley.

By some miracle, this makes Ciade turn around and Niki takes this as a chance.

She yanks him backwards by his shirt and slams him into the wall before pressing her forearm against his neck and pushing.

Not enough to do damage, enough so that he knows she is in charge here.

Niki knows when someone is scared, that's the whole good part of her powers. She can manipulate fear and control it, and right now she knows that Ciade is terrified, behind her she can feel Whirlpool's fear as well.

She needs to calm them both down.

This might make her pass out.

It's risky, but she's not sure if she can take two heroes already injured, not for much longer.

Niki reaches a hand up to Ciade's forehead and he thrashes, trying to get away, but Niki holds her ground.

"Calm down," Niki mutters.

Ciade collapses against the wall and Niki's vision swims

Right— these cuffs only fuck her up when she uses her powers. Neat.

She turns around to look at Whirlpool.

Whirlpool is still holding her arm, looks like Niki did real damage there.

Niki holds out one of her hands.

Whirlpool looks curious, she takes a step towards her.

Then Niki launches herself at Whirlpool, managing to tuck in her head as they both go scuffling onto the floor. Niki lands on the ground with a thump, and Whirlpool swings to punch her in the face.

Sadly it hits, and Niki defends herself with her arms.

Then she sneaks one hand up to Whirlpool's temple, and her eyes go wide.

Whirlpool doesn't go down as easily, and Niki struggles to actually calm down Whirlpool's heartbeat and breathing for a moment. She fights against Niki for too long for her liking.

Niki's head hurts and her eyes go blurry.

She needs to hold out, she needs to hold out—

Whirlpool passes out.

Niki gets up, and Whirlpool hits the ground with a thump.

Her legs are shaking as she starts down towards the entrance of the alley. She can barely walk, using the wall to keep her going. There's a pain in the back of her head, her wrist hurts and she doesn't even know why.

Logically she knows she has some sort of concussion.

She needs to get home, like now—

Her head spins again and she leans against the wall completely, before sliding down against it.

It feels... off.

She has no way of describing it apart from that, from feeling off... from feeling odd. Everything hurts and it just feels off, as if everything in her apartment was moved slightly to the left, but it's her body instead.

Her head swims again, and she sighs, leaning back against the wall.

The heroes might be incredibly stupid and leave her alone.

That would be nice.

Then there are footsteps in front of her.

Niki looks up.

In front of her is what appears to be a teenage girl, she has some sort of protest sign that she's holding and a scowl on her face.

She crouches down so she's in front of Niki before brushing some hair out of her face.

With long brown hair and a generally concerned expression, Niki was not sure if this was her new saviour or someone else.

“What the— frick are you doing?”

“Sittin’,” Niki manages.

“Well I guessed that much,” she mutters, then holds out a hand. “Hi, I’m Madie—”

Niki just looks at her.

“Right,” Madie mutters under her breath, she rolls her eyes and stands up straight again, “Well— unless you want to get caught by the heroes I would suggest you come with me, I am reliable and no one would say otherwise.”

“Now that has me concerned.”

Madie just smiles.

Cool.

Niki is... being saved by a child.

Niki probably isn’t much older than this child.

That’s fucking terrible.

“Well,” Madie says, clearly unimpressed with this entire situation, she holds out her hand, leaving the protest sign on the floor, “You need to get off the ground, and I need to get you literally anywhere else—”

“I’m fine.”

And with a surprising amount of strength, Madie manages to grab her up off the floor and swing one of Niki's arms around her own shoulders. Niki looks at her, lucky that her shocked expression is being hidden by the mask.

Madie doesn't say anything, and she starts basically... dragging Niki down the street.

"Slow down—"

"Nah," Madie replies.

Niki does have a rule about not fighting children— but there has to be an exception to every rule... right? If not she can ask Techno to fight a child, he would have a lot less of a moral crisis about it.

Bonuses of a best friend who was in what was essentially a child gladiator pit.

Madie sighs, turning them into an alleyway and placing Niki against a wall. Madie sighs, grabbing Niki's wrist with the power cuff on it, she examines it for a moment before reaching behind her head.

Then pulls out a bobby pin. "I think I've seen a locking system like this."

"Huh?" Niki asks, sounding a bit stupid.

"It's a basic reinforcing method, especially for cuffs, and I think there's some sorta— something stabbing you and that's making you all woozy. What's being affected?"

Niki blinks at the girl in front of her.

Who the fuck is this? Why the fuck does she know power cuff locks and what—

Niki's head spins again and Madie grabs her by the shoulders, keeping her upright.

“So—” Madie says slowly, “Basically it works by this little nub pushing out when it gets past a certain point, so to get the needle out, you need to find a notch on the needle and then you can push the needle back in.”

“There's a needle?”

“You're being drugged,” Madie deadpans, “I swear— nothing else makes sense,” Madie hands her the bobby pin and looks over her shoulder, her phone rings and Madie sighs, running a hand down her face. “That's my mum give me a moment.”

Madie picks up her phone.

Niki can hear a flurry of arguments that she can't be bothered to tune into. Her entire head feels fuzzy, it just feels odd, like something is— odd.

She stumbles to the side and Madie turns around to look at her.

“Now is not the time—”

“Oh, I apologise,” Niki slurs, before running into the wall again. “Sorry my drugging doesn't fit your—” she fades off.

Madie sighs.

She grabs Niki again, slinging an arm around her shoulders and getting her grip on her. Niki isn't a huge fan of this, but considering her legs are barely working, she thinks it's fine.

They walk down the street for a bit, and Madie looks at Niki again, "Where do I drop you off?"

"Aurelian?" A voice comes from above.

Niki knows that man.

Oh, thank fuck.

She looks up, and standing on the edge of one of the buildings is Techno, he's wearing his hero gear... which is weird, with the cape and everything, his hair isn't in the neat braid it's supposed to be, but instead a messy ponytail.

Why is Techno in his superhero gear?

And he's in his superhero gear like— badly, the cape still had creases in it, his skull mask is strapped to his side rather than actually on his face. His shirt and the bullet-proof corset protection thing he wears on his stomach is fine, but apart from that the rest of the outfit is a mess.

Niki says this as someone who takes Techno's presentation seriously.

He looks like a worse cosplayer, Niki's seen better Blade cosplayers than this, in fact, all cosplayers are better than this because at least they put some effort into it.

Techno looks at her, then at Madie, who is now using Niki as a human shield. Which is rude but smart, and Niki can't be too mad because it is clearly the logical situation in this case. So she lets herself be a human shield.

Just this once.

“You’re all heroey,” Niki mutters, “And you look like a sham while doing it—”

“Are you *drunk*? ”

Niki shakes her head, before lazily lifting up her wrist and shaking it at Techno, “Look, look — they put a *cuff* on me, and now I’m going all woooooo!” She throws both of her arms up in the air before falling against Madie.

Madie seems mildly unimpressed.

Niki blinks at them. “I think I’ll pass out now.”

“Wait, what—”

“Goodbye.”

And Niki passes out.

Amazing timing from her.

She should go into theatre or something.

Niki wakes up with panadol on her bedside table, a splitting headache and a heavy weight on her wrist. Right. Neither of these things are super odd, Niki is a vigilante and she does tend to wear bracelets on her wrist and not take them off and—

That's a cuff.

Cool.

Niki sighs, reaching over for her phone.

The Cooler Pinkette:

i need you to push me down the stairs

i have had A NIGHT let me tell you that

Favourite Dog Parent:

What...

The Cooler Pinkette:

Don't even want to get into it.

I need to run my head in the door

Favourite Dog Parent:

????

And because Techno is evil, and also the worst he doesn't respond beyond that, leaving Niki to just... blink at whatever the fuck just happened, because something just happened for sure, but she has no idea.

She blinks at her phone for a few moments, before sighing.

Rolling over, she looks at the cuff still on her wrist, she doesn't feel as out of it, which is always amazing. She blinks at it a few times, before sighing again, rolling onto her back and staring up at the roof.

Most people don't need to try and figure all of this out at nineteen, she's fucking nineteen, almost twenty— she doesn't know what she's doing. She knows that some of her friends from high school are at university and going to parties.

Instead, her best friend is a dog, a teenager slightly younger than her, and a mentally unstable superhero.

Yup.

That sounds about right.

She rolls out of bed, still glancing down at the cuff on her wrist and trying to figure it out.

Madie had said something about... pushing in a thing that meant she could drag the needle out of her skin, the idea seems sickening. Niki can handle blood, she's given a fair share of injuries and received slightly less.

But ew.

Does not mean she has to like it.

Her apartment is a small one, much smaller than Techno's because not everyone is on a hero salary, she doesn't get to catch those wins. It's cozy though, her bedroom barely fits a double bed, bedside table and a wardrobe.

The walls are painted an ugly pink colour, and because of that Niki has as many posters as she can physically have on the wall, and photos, she glances at the one that she tries not to look at.

Something in her stomach drops.

Still, after all of this time.

She turns around, before reaching into her wardrobe to grab literally anything, because she has work, because she hates herself apparently, and decided that she wanted to buy a bakery from her boss.

The rest of her apartment thankfully isn't the same pink colour, instead, it's a much nicer white shade. The carpet is brown and looks like the default one that comes with The Sims 4, the cheap default one.

On one of the walls is a long bookshelf, which is just as many books as it is random bits and pieces. Photos, plants... so many plants, random rocks that Aimsey or Techno have given her, pens and pencils, anything really.

The lounge room and kitchen are connected, on the side that her bedroom door is, there is a brown leather couch that Techno stole from Phil, and then gave to Niki as a moving-in present. There's a bright green armchair that Techno stole from... someone, Niki hadn't asked about that one.

The rug was Niki's, coming from her old place. The dust rug was something she should probably throw out, but she just couldn't bring herself, it wasn't fluffy like it had once been, it had been walked on too much and worn out. Apart from that, it was a TV on a stand, a PS4 in the corner and a bunch of games thrown everywhere.

Sadly, the kitchen is far less interesting, it is about the size of a shoe box. With weird plastic counters that means she can't make any sort of dough-related thing without it sticking and

tasting like plastic.

It's not fun.

Niki grabs the first pair of jeans she can find, and a shirt that doesn't really match, but it's a shirt, so it doesn't matter. She needs to re-dye her hair again, the blonde is starting to fade.

She might go purple actually.

Or pink again, that was fun.

With only slight difficulty, she manages to put a jacket on to cover the bulky cuff on her wrist, before leaving for the bakery.

The walk is short enough.

And it's slightly warm, so Niki gets very warm due to the thick jacket she is wearing. L'Manberg Summers suck and L'Manberg Winters suck slightly less due to the fact that most people here own several heavy jackets.

However, Niki gets warmer than she'd like walking in the heat.

Eventually, she manages to get to the bakery without burning to death, which is always a big win for her.

The bakery is basically a second home at this point, and Niki treats it as such. But for a moment she lets herself pause, and admires it, the work she's put into the place that she created for herself.

It's painted sage green, with a dark wooden door in the middle. On either side, spanning a good amount of the wall space are large windows that have various cakes and bread on it, it's all things they sell or donate though.

A few chairs and tables outside, and a woman is sitting, reading a newspaper intensely. Niki can see the headlines about protests and riots and Niki finds herself pulling her jacket sleeve down.

It's fine.

The door chimes as she opens it, the little bell doing its job and Niki smiles slightly at it.

It's nice.

Walking into the store is like a fresh breeze—literally, the aircon is on and Niki sighs as she walks in. There are already some customers in there, eating croissants and drinking coffee, and Niki walks towards the counter.

She checks her phone again.

Nothing from Techno.

She'll call him later.

"Niki!" A bright voice says.

Niki looks up from her phone, and standing in front of her is the light of her life, her worst enemy and one of her favourite people in the universe.

Aimsey.

Aimsey pulls down the all-too-familiar beanie, the black one with the daisy in the middle of it. The daisy with the smiley face.

Niki claims that she shouldn't wear it while serving customers.

And Aimsey does not agree with that, even slightly.

Niki sighs, walking behind the counter and giving Aimsey a look.

Aimsey gives Niki a bright smile, brushing their hair over their shoulder. "Niki..."

"No."

"You said I could!"

"I lied," Niki returns, walking into the kitchen, and Aimsey follows after her like a lost puppy, except Aimsey is slightly more aggressive than a puppy and keeps dropping things like his life depends on it. "Aimsey these need to be done quickly—"

"But why?"

"We have five cakes going out today."

"Isn't that the amount you normally do?"

“All to Upper L’Manberg.”

“Let me spit in them.”

“Do not spit in the cakes, one of these is five tiers.”

“Why is it—”

“Wedding cake,” Niki adds, “If you wanna mess with it, go for it, I’m sending the angry customers to you.”

“How are you even getting it there?”

“Big box,” Niki murmurs, “Someone else is delivering it— uh— Cress might be, I dunno, it’s not me and it sure is not you.”

“Why not?”

Niki sighs, looking at how much the cakes have been decorated. Okay, the wedding one is almost done, just needs some piped flowers, and one of the birthday cakes needs a Minecraft creeper on the front and—

What is Aimsey doing?

Aimsey pauses, with a cup on her head.

“Why?” Niki says.

Without a word, Aimsey takes the cup off their head and puts it on the counter.

They both look at each other.

“Nothing— nothing, I’m doing nothing. Can’t you see I’m doing nothing?”

Niki sighs.

Aimsey stands next to Niki, trying to silently laugh and failing, hitting the counter with their fist and Niki just sighs.

She manages to tune out Aimsey, a skill that she has become rather good at, due to the fact that... Aimsey generally has a lot of energy and Niki tends to have not a lot of energy most days.

With great skill, and maybe a bit of ignoring of various crashing around her, Niki manages to get to focus on her work.

Decorating cakes has always been her favourite part of the job, she used to do that with her dad when she was younger, carefully decorating cakes as he would laugh and show her how to actually do it.

And there’s something peaceful about it, Niki can almost imagine herself in the kitchen of her childhood home. It’s warm, and there’s the chaotic yelling that a family has, the sort of lighthearted ones. There’s something on the TV, her mum is at the counter working and—

“Ayup,” someone says and Niki looks up.

Sure enough, the all-too-familiar orange hair that Niki is familiar with, Niki laughs shortly, seeing Twi standing there in all their glory. He looks between Niki and Aimsey before nodding slowly.

“Right—” he says, before looking at the cake, “Well, I’ll be hauling that to Upper L’Manberg.”

“Oh, Prime help us,” Niki mutters fondly.

“You should spit in the cake!” Aimsey says excitedly, “Niki won’t let me because she’s boring, but if you just *accidentally*. ”

Twì grins, something that is... chaos lights up on his face and they grin a bit brighter, before looking at Niki, “Do not worry Miss Niki, I would *never* spit in your hard worked wedding cake, however— if I did.”

Niki sighs. “Just... don’t get caught.”

Twì beams.

Niki sighs, going back to her work as Twì and Aimsey inevitably make some sort of evil plan because they’re unreliable.

The methodology of piping the cakes is easy, it’s one that Niki knows. One she can engross herself in doing, it’s as familiar to her as anything else. She knows this. And she can do it well.

It’s nice.

She manages to zone out in a way, where she’s completely aware of what she’s doing and there’s peace in it. She knows how to do this, she’s completely sure of her movements and the way to move the piping bag and—

It's just nice that Niki can know what she's doing, for once in her life at least.

Niki goes to refill the piping bag, with the icing that's been made up by Aimsey and she pauses when she sees Aimsey paused by the icing bowl, holding it with their arm and a spoon in the other hand.

"Aimsey."

"Niki?"

"Stop eating the frosting—" Niki says, pushing at Aimsey and Aimsey just laughs. They look at Niki, with that look in their eyes that Niki has learnt to hate— before licking the spoon again.

Niki cries out, swatting at Aimsey with a tea towel, and Aimsey howls with laughter as she folds over herself, clutching her stomach as she laughs with gasping breaths. Niki just watches as Aimsey makes himself laugh so hard that he can't stand up.

She sighs, running a hand down her face. "Aimsey," Niki says, "I swear—"

Aimsey laughs even harder.

Niki is going to murder a child today.

Sure, Aimsey isn't actually much younger than Niki, but it's not about that, it's about the vibes, and Aimsey has the biggest younger-sibling vibes of anyone Niki is yet to meet.

Aimsey manages to stand up from being on the floor and xe grins.

"Aimsey—"

Aimsey responds by twirling around, before sprinting out of the room.

Niki sighs.

Children these days.

And maybe she smiles a little because Aimsey can just be a kid, just for a bit at least, he can just live and be as normal as a photography student can be. It's nice to watch. Just— finally someone in L'Manberg acting like a normal child.

It's pretty rare.

Niki knows about that better than anyone.

She sighs, turning back to the mess of the bench that Aimsey has made, and runs a hand down her face yet again. Sure, a teenager acting like a teenager is amazing, but what is less amazing is the tornado that Aimsey somehow manages to leave behind her as she speeds through the kitchens.

“Aimsey!” Niki calls out.

Aimsey rolls back into the kitchen, skidding slightly and their sneakers squeak on the floor as they run in.

Niki sighs. “Can you please help me clean up?”

Aimsey hums, looking at the mess they have caused. Then star smiles.

Oh no.

“Niki?” Aimsey asks innocently, which is not a good way for Aimsey to start anything.

Niki looks up from the cake she’s currently frosting.

“Do you believe in em dashes?”

“Pardon?”

“Like— are you the sorta person who uses a hyphen instead of an em dash while texting people, or worse you use two hyphens.”

Niki just stares at the chaos demon who calls himself Aimsey.

“What does... that mean?” Niki eventually decides on saying, staring at Aimsey who grins.

She turns around and walks away.

Leaving Niki standing there, so incredibly confused.

“Wait—” Niki calls out, “What does that mean—”

Aimsey, the little shit, doesn’t respond.

Wait.

Aimsey didn't help clean up.

After a bit of bickering, and a lot of threats from Niki, with a tea towel, one of her most effective weapons, she manages to get Aimsey to help clean up.

Aimsey is not a fan of this, they complain the entire time as they clean up the kitchen.

Niki supervises.

Halfway through Aimsey attempting to get the last of the frosting out of the bowl, they pause and look up at Niki. "There are protests."

"Yes," Niki says easily, she pulls the jacket sleeve down, "I am vaguely aware of the mess that Theseus has caused—"

"It wasn't really Theseus though," Aimsey says, "Right? Didn't they have so many proposed things, it feels like *something* would give eventually, and Theseus is a great fear-mongering tactic."

And Niki has known Aimsey since they were both cashiers here, with Niki being sixteen and Aimsey being fifteen.

They know each other.

And Niki can tell when Aimsey has an idea, and right now Niki can see Aimsey has the best idea they think they've ever had.

Niki stares at Aimsey. "No—"

“Yup,” Aimsey replies with a grin, “Niki it is my civil right—”

“You’ll get hurt.”

Aimsey looks at Niki, mouth open, and then they look around to make sure no one else is around. “Oh, so *I’m* not allowed to get hurt but you are.”

“You’re younger—”

“By like a year,” Aimsey mutters.

“More than a year.”

“I’m not that much younger,” Aimsey mutters, “Niki— I’m allowed to protest, I won’t get hurt you know what my powers are like, I won’t get hurt.”

“Your powers are what worries me!”

“I have it under control,” Aimsey hisses back at her, “Okay? You don’t need to fucking— worry about everything, you don’t need to worry about everything. Not with me, I know what I’m doing. I’m not weak.”

“I didn’t say you were—”

“Well you need some more faith in me,” Aimsey returns unkindly, “I’m not a kid anymore Niki.”

“You’re eighteen.”

“You’re nineteen!” Aimsey returns, “You became a vigilante when you were eighteen—”

Niki looks at him with wide eyes, before looking over her shoulder and out at the bakery, they’re all regulars, even if they did hear, Niki knows that all of them will just have been... conveniently busy with their newspaper.

“Why do you know that—”

“Because I know you?” Aimsey replies, side-eyeing Niki, “I know you, and I know you’re a fucking hypocrite, that’s what you are, a fucking hypocrite, a fucking hypocrite! You were younger than me—”

“Yeah and look how I turned out!” Niki returns harshly.

Aimsey pauses, looking at Niki, “I like how you’ve turned out,” they say softly, “You’re a nice person— if I’m half the person you would be, then I’d be content.”

Niki turns around putting her hands behind her head as she paces around, taking deep breaths because she doesn’t want to yell. “You don’t want that, Aimsey, okay? You don’t want that —”

“I do.”

“Aimsey—”

Aimsey doesn’t back down.

They never do.

Kids these days—

“It’s dangerous,” Niki murmurs under her breath, “You know it’s dangerous, protesting is dangerous, especially for you, what if you have an outburst and say you’re dangerous, I can’t protect you from—”

“I don’t want that!” Aimsey yells, finally breaking the calmness they’ve been able to keep up. “I don’t want to be coddled my entire life, the world is changing around us and I’m supposed to sit back and watch. Do you sit back and watch?”

Niki stays quiet.

“No! You did something about it, you saw something broken with the world and you did what you could to change it, you always do *something* and I’m allowed to do something, I’m allowed to do something—you can’t take that, you can’t!”

“You’re *eighteen*. No eighteen-year-old in their life has ever made a slightly good decision.”

“What if it gets worse?” Aimsey challenges, “Inaction will change nothing, I’m barely a kid anymore— legally at least, and what if it gets worse? Because everyone does nothing, I won’t be one of those people who sit back and just— allow this to happen! Like how you aren’t—”

“You shouldn’t need to—”

“Well, I do!” Aimsey yells back, slamming their hands on the counter. “I shouldn’t have to, but I do. And you know I’m doing this with or without you helping me through this, I am not watching my city burn when I can help.”

“You only have a bucket.”

“And everyone else has a bucket!” Aimsey hisses, “Everyone can do *something* and you can not expect me to spend time with you and then expect me not to fight. I am a powered person, I can *use* these powers, I can help people.”

“You sound like a hero.”

Aimsey laughs, smiling and tilting his head at Niki, he laughs a bit before shaking his head, “You— see that’s the problem, isn’t it? A hero does not mean *superhero* , hero is just— a word, it’s what you want it to be, and I want it to be a good thing.”

Niki crosses her arms and frowns.

Aimsey returns her frown.

“You don’t—”

“I am one of the fuckheads who lives in Logstedchire, I grew up here, just like you, just like Theseus— and I know the politicians like to call us lazy or dumb or whatever word their tiny brains can think of on the day. But we’re not! And I’m not taking all of this *bullshittery* sitting down, I need to brick a cop.”

“Do not brick a cop—”

“I’m gonna brick a cop.”

Niki sighs, pinching the bridge of her nose. “Aimsey...”

“It’s dangerous,” Aimsey says, “I know my powers might put a target on my back, telekinesis is rare, especially with the control I have. I know— I know Niki, but I can’t just keep my head down. I don’t *want to* , I want to cause problems and throw things and get mad because I have been mad for a long time and I have kept my head down and— I’m sick of it.”

Niki sighs, leaning down so she is basically crouched on the floor, she runs a hand through her hair and looks at Aimsey, it's about the most stressed she's ever felt, looking at Aimsey who still...

Still, has the expression Niki had when she put on the Aurelian costume for the first time. The brightness in her eyes and—

“It's been a while since I've made a protest sign,” Niki murmurs, “We're going to have to Google it.”

“I have it bookmarked.”

Niki laughs, shaking her head and running her hand through her hair again trying to get rid of some of the excess stress. It doesn't work. “Of course you do, I expect no less from you.”

And Aimsey grins.

Niki tries to shake off her terrible feeling about this.

Once again, it doesn't work.

The rest of the day passes calmly, and Niki tries to ignore the sinking feeling, Aimsey is as... Aimsey-y as Aimsey ever is. Managing to stay out of the way and be actually helpful, along with being the least amount of help in the entire universe.

Aimsey knocks off earlier than Niki does, because Niki sets her own hours and hates herself apparently, maybe in that order. Because she gets the fun job of staying behind and cleaning up to prepare for when the bakers come in in the morning.

Thankfully she's not in the bakery actually— baking until Tuesday so she can go on patrol and sleep in, ideally.

Maybe.

Aimsey will probably find out a way to ruin that because Aimsey likes to call her at odd times with even odder questions.

Eventually, she manages to close up, and finally go home.

Her apartment really feels like coming home, even if she has to fight with the door to properly open it, and avoid the weird stain on the carpet which *might* be blood but no one's really sure.

Trudging up the stairs, she opens the door and—

That's Floof.

Floof is supposed to be at Techno's right now.

Niki sighs as Floof spins around in circles out of pure excitement that Niki is home, he bounces around happily, before looking at Niki with the wide innocent eyes that he has.

“Hey, buddy!” Niki says excitedly, and Floof seems just as excited because he jumps around. “Yes, yes, the favourite parent is here, now why are you here—”

Floof barks at her happily.

“See I understand your point,” Niki says, walking to the lounge room and throwing her jacket and bag onto the couch, “But I need to know who got you here, and why Techno didn’t text me that—”

Niki’s phone buzzes.

The Cooler Pinkette:

Floof is at yours.

Won’t be home tonight

Also, don’t go out tonight

Favourite Dog Parent:

what is happening at the tower?

The Cooler Pinkette:

Got out of a ten-hour meeting

Not looking good.

Niki squints at her phone, Techno’s tone is hard to decipher at the best of times, and then you add the lack of expression and body language that comes with text and Niki has no clue how bad it is.

Knowing Techno, the phrase ‘not looking good’ can mean brownies that are slightly burnt, to half of the city burning down. He does not make it easy, not even in the slightest and Niki is left here to squint at her phone.

Favourite Dog Parent:

????

Can you elaborate?

The Cooler Pinkette:

Theseus is somehow the number one enemy.

Also using his 'image' on things is banned now

I am in so much trouble with Phil & Wilbur

I should've brought Floof

Okay, gotta dip.

Favourite Dog Parent:

you have somehow explained less

She's not too surprised by the lack of anything useful, because it's Techno and Techno does not elaborate until he elaborates everything at once.

With a sigh, she turns around to look at the coffee table.

She has so much she needs to do, bakery things and other things and organising people is not easy even slightly. Figuring out shifts and pays and then organising everyone and—

Oh.

Niki looks down at the weight on her wrist, the reason she wore a jacket the entire day.

She should... probably fix that.

With a sigh, Niki sits herself down, with a bobby pin and nothing but sheer determination and will.

She tries to remember what Madie told her, something that she had to push inwards, then she could get the needle out. It's not effecting her too badly anymore—

It's just... annoying, Niki can't use her powers, not really, she tries to summon them even for easy things and nothing happens. If anything does happen, her head spins and she can barely stand up for about half an hour and generally, it's a little bit terrible.

So for what feels like several lifetimes, she fumbles with the mechanisms. Luckily her wrist is smaller than whoever it was intended for, meaning she can actually get a bobby pin underneath.

It takes a long time, and Niki makes her skin red from scraping the bobby pin across it several times.

Eventually, she manages to hold her hand right, slightly twisted and she manages to push the locking mechanism in then using the same bobby pin she manages to push the needle back into the cuff.

There's a clicking noise and the cuff falls off her wrist and onto the table with a clang.

She actually did it.

Of course, she did, she's the best.

For a few moments, she pauses, picking up the cuff and examining it. It's like a really big bangle, and Niki has a couple of guesses about what's in it, that drugs whoever wears it so their powers don't work.

Most of the answers she doesn't like, and have terrifying implications for any vigilante.

Examining the cuff and almost closing it shows what it does, when it gets to a certain closure level the needle will shoot out and presumably into the wrist of anyone it's put on. Then to actually fix it, there's a nub that locks it into place, so that has to be locked into place and then lifted back into the cuff.

She practices that a few times just on the table.

Then looks at her wrist.

It would be risky, especially if she couldn't get it back off again.

But when has she cared about risk?

Or her own safety and well-being?

She snaps it back onto her wrist.

Her head spins at it— oh shit there's actually still stuff in there.

Okay.

Niki's eyes go blurry for a moment and she shakes her head, she will not let some man, a *superhero* who invented this thing win. She refuses, she is better than he will ever be and will outclass this easily.

Grabbing the bobby-pin again she readjusts her eye sight, eyes narrowed.

Her head spins again.

She manages to spin the bobby-pin in a way that makes the thing that's supposed to click, click. And she pushes it up back into the cuff.

Sure enough, the cuff falls onto the table again.

Niki grins.

No hero is going to outsmart her...

Apart from Techno that one time.

But that's just Techno, he barely counts.

It's the morning when Niki gets a call, she's barely awake and fumbles to grab her phone from her bedside table.

She manages to accept the call and bring it up to her ear, wiping the sleep out of her eyes and sitting up. "Guten mor—"

That's German wait—

"Hi!" Aimsey's voice comes through the other side of the phone. "I need help?"

This makes Niki sit up, and her brain goes into vigilante mode. "Are you in a safe spot, where are you—"

"No, no," he laughs, "Uh— basically, I'm moving out from my parent's, y'know for uni, I'm moving into student housing—"

"Yeah, I helped you pick which building?"

"—And I found out that I have to bring my own furniture."

Niki's brain short circuits. That's really fucking odd, for sure. But she hums because Aimsey doesn't lie about stuff like this.

"And uh— I move in at three this afternoon."

"What?"

"I got an email like an hour ago because universities want me dead, I swear. I'm paying extra for housing and I need furniture."

"I don't have any, well I have a dodgy desk chair if you want that, I've been meaning to throw it out—"

There's a knock on her door, and Niki jumps, grabbing the knife on her bedside table and sitting up.

She stays quiet for a moment, listening for footsteps or anything that gave someone away. She swung her legs over the bed and stood up.

Another knock on the door.

"Let me in!"

That was— Aimsey.

The fuck?

Niki walks to her door, swinging it open, still holding the knife by her side.

Sure enough, Aimsey stands in front of her, she had on a plain black beanie, what looked like pyjama shorts and a hoodie with a bunch of food stains.

She does have shoes on, which was always ideal.

Niki just blinks at Aimsey.

Aimsey hangs up the call, before giving a slightly apologetic smile. "Wanna go furniture shopping?"

"Aimsey, it is seven in the morning."

"I am aware."

Niki sighs.

What type of sister would she be, if she didn't agree to Aimsey's shenanigans?

Niki sighs, pinching the bridge of her nose. "Okay, write down a list of things you actually need. You can take a bed and mattress from your parents, and a wardrobe, so what do you really need?"

"A desk, a desk chair, uh— bedside table and a bookshelf. But like a really big bookshelf."

"Why?"

"I want a really big bookshelf."

Aimsey brings up an excellent point.

She sighs, before grabbing a jacket, because the weather here is unpredictable at best, even in Summer. She grabs her wallet and pulls on some shoes.

Aimsey chucks her the car keys, which is wise for everyone.

Aimsey *can* drive, they have their own car, and legally they can drive. But emotionally? For Niki's own emotions she will never be in a car that Aimsey is driving again.

The walk to the actual car is short because Aimsey has parked right outside of the complex. Which is... illegal.

But it's Aimsey and that's never stopped her before.

Niki gets into the car, sitting in the driver's side and holding out her hand for Aimsey to pass her the keys.

Aimsey doesn't.

“Aimsey.”

“I wanna drive—”

Niki reaches over and snatches the keys out of Aimsey’s hand, which is something Aimsey doesn’t appear to be a fan of, because they slouch down in their seat with a frown.

“Don’t be salty about it.”

“I think I will be salty about it.”

Niki starts the car and drives onto the road, she keeps glancing at Aimsey who, without fail, everytime manages to look at Niki and glare at her. Which is hilarious, because sometimes Aimsey is looking away from Niki, out the window on the other side, and somehow she still manages to turn around and look at Niki.

It’s a bit hilarious.

Niki keeps driving the car, like a normal human person who doesn’t want to crash into everyone who pulls out in front of her, unlike Aimsey who decides to take it upon themselves to flip them all off.

Aimsey has road rage, apparently.

And considering everyone is trying to get to work, this means that there is chaos on the roads, combined with the curfews and all the checkpoints makes for an interesting time, to say the least.

Luckily they're only travelling inside Logstedchire, meaning that Niki won't need to fight someone today.

Maybe tomorrow.

The car ride is as short as it can be when there are a bunch of clogged roads, but they get to the store that Aimsey so desired to go to.

It's a local one, and Aimsey claims they open at six in the morning just before university starts up because they *know* everyone is scrambling to get things done in time.

Shockingly enough, Aimsey is right.

There's a bunch of other students outside, rushing about slightly with arms full of *things* which is hilarious because Niki knows the feeling, a day before she moved into her current apartment she realised that she had just about nothing.

Aimsey gets out of the car before it fully stops, and Niki tries to hide her sister instincts the best she can and not rapidly swear at Aimsey, luckily she doesn't do that, and stops the car.

They both walk up to the furniture store, walking in.

"Now," Aimsey says, "I think we should get you something as well."

"No."

"But look at this!" Aimsey says, gesturing to a neon orange chair, they run over to it, before sitting down in it. It's a desk chair, so they spin around as they keep speaking, "What do you mean this *isn't* the ideal chair?"

“You get it then—”

Aimsey stops spinning for a moment, before looking down at the price.

“I was joking, that was a joke—”

“I’m getting it,” Aimsey says, standing up and looking at the chair a bit longer. Xe squints at the pricetag again, seemingly regretting every decision ever made. “Yup, I’m getting it.” They grab one of the boxes with the disassembled chair in it.

Then they hand it to Niki.

Niki sighs, and holds it, because she’s probably a lot stronger than Aimsey, although Aimsey will literally never admit it.

Wait how is this going to fit in the car—

Aimsey apparently does not give a single shit, because they keep walking down.

There’s a yellow desk on display.

“You do not have the money for that—”

“But it’s the same colour as the Earl of Lemongrab—”

“What does that mean in normal person?”

“I will make you watch Adventure Time with me,” Aimsey seems to promise, or maybe threaten, it’s hard to tell. “Think of Marceline and Princess Bubblegum—”

“I don’t know what the means in normal person—”

“Gay!” Aimsey cries out.

Several people in the store stop to look at her.

“They’re gay for each other, Niki, and they’re the best and— and— they’re gay for each other, Niki, are you not convinced?.”

“I—” Niki blinks at them, “I’m glad?”

“It’s called self-love, it’s called self-love, alright?”

“Sure,” Niki shifts the desk chair so she’s carrying it differently like it’s a big tray of something, but with two arms, because she has the sneaking feeling that Aimsey is going to pile up more and more things.

Aimsey browses the tables for a while.

He gets distracted by the wall decorations though and runs over excitedly.

Niki sighs, before rushing over to see what’s got Aimsey all excited.

It’s a bunch of fairy lights, and Aimsey has no hesitation and dumps about three of them on top of the desk chair box that Niki is already carrying. This is going to be a long day—

With great difficulty, and some light teasing, they manage to get back to the desks and Aimsey points out all the expensive ones. The fancy ones, with the deep wood and the fancy looking draws and whatever else fancy desks have.

“I think you should get... that one,” they point at one, which looks like someone ripped it straight out of some politician’s office. “It is... three-thousand dollars, a bit low for the budget but the quality is nice.”

“Let me drop my spare three-thousand dollars real quick, no worries.”

Aimsey beams, “And then after that, you should get that fancy bed frame, the one with the canopy.”

“It would not fit in my bedroom—”

“Details, details,” Aimsey waves her hand around dismissively. “They’re only details. Just details! I think you should get the canopy bed.”

“Maybe one day,” Niki laughs, “When I don’t live in a shoebox and maybe when Logstedchire isn’t three steps away from a civil war.”

Aimsey tuts, shaking their head and they walk off again.

Niki sighs, before following after xem and watching as he would get distracted by boxes and stuff every few steps and then they’d realise what they were supposed to be doing and carry on.

“This is nice,” Aimsey says.

Niki turns around and sees perhaps the worst bedside table that Niki has ever seen and... well it's also the best thing she has ever gotten the honour of looking at.

It's a frog. The thing gets bigger at the top, with two draws that take up the bottom half of the actual end-side table thing. There are four legs around the actual body of it, connected to the main part. The other half is... for the features, perhaps the worst part of it.

The eyes are mostly yellow, with black pupils and uneven eyelids over them, which means the frog end side table looks— drunk or something else. The mouth is also not helping that, with a derpy smile.

On top of the bedside table is a glass pane... meaning the frog looks like they're wearing a graduation cap, and the thing hanging off the side of that doesn't help.

Niki looks at Aimsey.

Aimsey looks like she has fallen in love.

“You can not get an orange desk chair and—”

Aimsey rushes over to the bedside table and throws their arms around the frog, hugging it tightly before looking up at Niki with a wide smile on their face. “It's only a couple of bucks.”

“I think it's for children.”

“My therapist says you're supposed to heal your inner child,” Aimsey says, before picking up one of the boxes and looking at the front of it.

They squint at it for a moment, before seemingly approving of it, and hoisting it up so Niki is carrying it on top of the box for the desk chair.

Children are awful.

“Aimsey, this will not match slightly—”

“Orange dinosaur sheets,” Aimsey challenges, they take a few steps away, before sure enough, picking up orange dinosaur sheets. “That *will* match and I know it will, it’s the same shade of orange. *And* they have green on them. I am so skilled.”

Niki sighs, “Kid—”

“Look,” Aimsey says, “I have my own money for like— the first time in my life, and... I know none of this matches, and does not meet the aesthetic I want at all— but it makes me happy, and it’s fun.”

Niki just nods.

“And—” Aimsey says with a smile, “I can just paint it all or something if I hate it. Might be stuck with the orange desk chair but I can fix it, or get new furniture or steal some from someone else. If I get some dumb things does it really matter?”

“I guess not.”

Aimsey beams, before turning around and continuing on with their shopping spree.

Niki decides to get a trolley, because she’s suffering like this, and dumps all of the stuff in there and follows Aimsey around as they look for a desk again, and Aimsey makes a very responsible choice.

It’s a plain white desk.

It also is the cheapest, which is most likely the reason why they got it, and it's a pretty decent size too.

"We should paint it!" Aimsey says, putting the desk into the trolley, "A bunch of flowers."

"That sounds lovely," Niki means it, and Aimsey can tell because of course star can, they smile up at Niki brightly and Niki smiles back with the same brightness. "What would you like to paint on it?"

Aimsey hums thoughtfully. "Flowers."

"Flowers?"

"I like flowers," Aimsey says.

Niki shudders, "They're awful."

"Why?"

"Used to work at a florist," Niki says, "When I first was working at the bakery, I had to dethorn so many roses, which is the most annoying job. Then you have to deal with weddings and—" Niki shakes her head and shudders.

"Weddings?"

"Most florists get most of their income from doing flowers for weddings, and— well weddings are intense. So at the ripe old age of fifteen, I would be getting screamed at for arrangements I didn't even make."

“Ah, customer service.”

“We can paint flowers if you want, they’re easy, just make sure I don’t smell a rose.”

“Will do, cap’n,” Aimsey gave a salute that was probably offensive to actual military personnel, “Now we need a bookshelf and I can pick my bed frame up from my parents and then... I’ll move in.”

“Do you wanna come back to mine?” Niki says, “You probably need breakfast and coffee.”

“Coffee,” Aimsey says wistfully, “I love coffee—”

They head further into the aisle of the office things, Aimsey apparently on the lookout for a bookshelf, and they start walking down the aisle.

“I am aware—”

“If I could, I’d marry coffee.”

“Would coffee be a man?”

Aimsey screws up their face and shakes their head. “I am gendering the coffee to suit my own needs, and now I will marry the coffee, and you can’t do anything about it.”

“I don’t think that’s legal.”

“I think you’re old.”

Niki just sighs fondly, shaking her head slightly as Aimsey continues on their quest for the perfect bookshelf, which is objectively hilarious, because xe doesn't seem to be able to make up her mind.

"I like the blue one."

"Then get the blue one—"

"But I *also* like the pink one, and I also like the white one because then that goes with my desk as well, I can be all colour coordinated and cool, don't you wanna be colour coordinated, Niki?"

"Did not stop you from getting dinosaur bedsheets."

Aimsey gasps, holding their hand to their heart, as if they've just been shot through the heart or something. "Niki, you traitor!"

Niki just sighs, walking off.

"Niki!" Aimsey yells, starting to run to catch up, "Don't leave me!"

"I am leaving," Niki retorts, "Consider this me leaving."

Aimsey manages to catch up within a few steps and throws her arms around Niki's neck and manages to drag her backwards.

Niki makes a noise, having her weight thrown back so quickly and she starts to topple towards the ground.

That means they're both going down.

Aimsey makes a noise as they go plummeting towards the ground, dragging Niki with him.

Niki tucks her head in and—

They don't hit the floor.

Instead, Niki opens her eyes and sees that they're vaguely hovering above the ground, just before Aimsey can actually hit the ground and Niki lands on xem.

Aimsey seems to realise what they've done because a moment later they actually fall.

Niki manages to twist out of the way slightly, so she only lands half on Aimsey and the pair of them stay there, on the floor for a moment, trying to figure out... well whatever just happened, Niki still isn't quite sure.

Aimsey looks around carefully.

No one's seen.

"Holy shit," Aimsey murmurs.

Niki nods, "Aimsey what have I told you about—"

"I didn't *mean to* ," Aimsey hisses back.

“You said you could control your powers.”

“Yeah, and I can, most of the time at least.”

Niki sighs, pinching the bridge of her nose. She gets onto her feet and helps Aimsey up as well.

Both of them look at each other for a long moment.

“Have you been practicing?” Niki asks.

Aimsey’s wince is enough to tell her everything she needs to know.

“Aimsey!”

They don’t respond, only standing up and grabbing the trolley and the cheapest white bookshelf which is still a decent size. They carry it with only a little bit of difficulty before putting it in the cart.

Niki sighs.

Overpowered children are her worst nightmare.

And she has to figure out depreciation on bowls when it’s tax season.

Niki follows after Aimsey as they approach the counter.

Sure enough, Aimsey pays for all the furniture and glares at Niki as they walk out to the car.

Niki unlocks the car since she still has the keys and leans against the side of the car as Aimsey attempt to put everything into the car. Everything is still heavy though, and it's going to be difficult as shit.

So Niki watches as Aimsey struggles to get everything into the car.

“Do you need a hand?” Niki asks.

“No,” Aimsey says, teeth gritted as she almost drops the box that the bookshelf is in onto the ground. “I’m fine.”

“Sure,” Niki responds.

Aimsey struggles for about fifteen more seconds.

“Can you help?” Aimsey asks.

Niki laughs, picking up the bookshelf from Aimsey and putting it into the boot of the car, she shuffles around the office chair to make room for the desk and the frog end table. Which she does.

Without much effort, she puts both of the other items into the car.

Aimsey frowns, “I hate that you’re actually strong,” they complain, “It’s terrible.”

Niki rolls her eyes, “You coming back to mine? I have eggs.”

“I love eggs!” Aimsey says excitedly.

So that has been established.

The drive home feels a lot shorter, Aimsey has some song stuck in their head which they sing as they drive through the streets.

It’s a lot emptier, considering that the workday has actually started, so they get back quickly.

Niki throws Aimsey the apartment keys and heads up there. Niki decides to put the car in the actual *designated parking* . So that Aimsey doesn’t get some sort of ticket and won’t have to deal with that.

She parks and clambers up towards her apartment.

Aimsey is already sitting at the counter. “Make me food, peasant.”

Niki sighs and goes to make Aimsey food.

She grabs the fry pan and a bunch of extra things, eggs, various herbs and spices because Aimsey deserves better than unseasoned eggs. She turns on the stove and puts the fry pan on it.

Grabbing a bowl she turns around to crack the eggs into the bowl and then whisk them and—

Aimsey is already dancing, struggling to put on music.

And Niki already knows the song from the first few notes, and she moves side to side as she cracks the eggs into the bowl and attempts to find a whisk, or just a fork, at this point if she's being completely honest.

Aimsey seems to be vibing, in that middle ground between bopping and actually dancing, she had a hold of a wooden spoon that is apparently now a microphone, and Niki actually wants that spoon for later—

“Draw the cat eye sharp enough to kill a man,” Aimsey scream-sings into the spoon, they're not trying to sound good, Aimsey's just trying to have fun, and it really seems that they're succeeding at that.

“You did some bad things, but I'm the worst of them,” Aimsey sings dramatically into the spoon.

Niki looks back down, smiling slightly, and she starts to crack the eggs into the bowl.

“Niki sing with me!” Aimsey yells, taking the spoon away from his face for a moment.

“I can't sing—”

She is cut off by Aimsey and Taylor Swift

“Sometimes I wonder which one'll be your last lie,” Aimsey continues, with the seriousness of someone who is performing on the x-factor or something. It's a little bit funny and very endearing.

Aimsey does a proper bop this time, waving the spoon around excitedly as they wait for the next lines.

“They say looks can kill and I might try.”

Niki finally finds a fork and starts whisking the eggs, before finding all the various other things ready to put into the eggs.

"I don't dress for women." Niki sings under her breath, almost absent-mindedly and Aimsey whoops.

"I do."

"Aimsey," Niki sighs.

"I don't dress for men." They both sing.

"Lately, I've been dressin' for revenge." Niki sings.

Aimsey squints at her, "Are you dressing for revenge?"

"Well, I'm not dressing for women or men."

"What about friends?" Aimsey asks.

They both stare at each other for a moment before bursting out laughing, it's so dumb, it's not even that funny. They wheeze for a long moment, mostly unable to breathe or do anything practical as they laugh.

Niki has to stop her quest of cooking to laugh at perhaps the dumbest thing she's ever heard, which is hilarious and also amazing.

And finally, they manage to gain composure.

Before giving each other one look and wheezing all over again, with no control even slightly. Niki grabs onto the counter so she doesn't fall onto the ground. "Okay," Niki says between wheezes, "We're banned from 'Vigilante Shit'."

"Why do you hate Miss Taylor Swift." Aimsey asks offended, "This feels like a hate crime Niki— what's your last name?"

"Matthews?"

"Niki Matthews?" Aimsey asks, "Aren't you German?"

"Mum was," Niki replies easily, "So no, I do not have a German last name."

"You should."

Niki just looks at Aimsey. "Huh?"

"German last names are way cooler," Aimsey says, "Like— Matthews, what a basic name."

"That's kinda the point, Aimsey."

Aimsey scowls slightly, "Fine."

Niki huffs, dropping an omelette onto a plate and then dropping that omelette in front of Aimsey. Sliding it across the counter, Aimsey looks up at her. Aimsey only hesitates for a few moments before taking a bite out of the omelette.

Aimsey huffs, “Get me coffee.”

“Get your own coffee,” Niki responds, but she grabs the shitty instant coffee that she keeps for when Aimsey comes over, before turning on the kettle. “I don’t have much sugar left— I might have some cubes somewhere.”

“It’s fine,” Aimsey waves a hand, “I just need to— function.”

Niki rolls her eyes, before settling herself on the task of making an omelette for herself, because she deserves it. She woke up early and was generally living the best life, she was doing well.

The second time is easier, and Niki basically lets herself go on autopilot, half tuned out as Aimsey talks about university, and eventually stands up to make their shitty instant coffee and Niki basically scarfs down her food.

They sit in silence, Aimsey and Niki both on their phones, scrolling absent-mindedly with no real purpose to it.

“Be back,” Aimsey says, standing up and grabbing the keys.

Niki gives star a weird look as they walk out of the building.

Niki glances back at her phone again.

The Cooler Pinkette:

Niki

Niki

NIKI

Favourite Dog Parent:

Yeah?

The Cooler Pinkette:

can you please have a crisis?

This meeting is so incredibly boirig

Favourite Dog Parent:

Amazing spelling Tech

The Cooler Pinkette:

Niki I will let you keep Floof forever

Please. I hate meetings.

The door opens and Aimsey steps back in, this time holding the orange desk chair that they insisted on getting, and are clearly struggling with it. Niki laughs as they try to get it through the door and run into the doorframe.

The chair isn't even that big.

Favourite Dog Parent:

sorry, have a child to babysit

Then she puts her phone face down on the table.

She can almost hear the annoyance that Techno must be having on the other side of the city, and she laughs to herself because of it. Then she watches Aimsey trying to get through the door and stands up to help assist.

It is not a difficult task, but Aimsey appears to think it is, because they sigh with the amount of relief Niki would expect from someone who disarmed some sort of weapon or closed an intergalactic wormhole.

Aimsey puts the chair on the floor.

Then starts getting all the pieces out, and the instructions.

Niki just watches curiously.

“Are you gonna help me?” Aimsey asks.

“Nah,” Niki says, “I’m gonna clean up the kitchen.”

“Niki,” Aimsey whines.

“The kitchen is a right mess,” Niki replies easily, “I’m going to fix that, and if you’re still stuck then I’ll help out.”

So begins, the incredibly boring task of cleaning up the kitchen.

Wiping down the stove and counters, washing the dishes, and getting the egg that Aimsey *somehow* stuck onto the wall, Niki still has no idea how they did it. She manages to get that off the wall.

Washing the dishes is incredibly boring, Niki... does it.

The only interesting part about it is Aimsey yelling in frustration and flopping onto the floor because of it, laying on her back, staring up at the roof like it's personally wronged them.

Niki laughs.

Aimsey flips her off.

Niki laughs a little bit harder.

After the kitchen is all nice and clean, the dishes dried and less egg on the wall, Niki roams down to where Aimsey is sitting on the floor.

He's squinting at the instructions, then looking at the chair pieces on the floor, and then Niki takes the instructions off of Aimsey.

It makes... no sense.

Niki squints at it.

She hands it back to Aimsey.

"What?" Aimsey screeches, "What's the point in you if you can't help me?"

Niki gives Aimsey a look.

Aimsey looks a bit sheepish about it, at least and looks back at the instructions. “I dunno,” Aimsey says, squinting, “It’s confusing me.”

Niki sits down on the floor next to xem and looks through all the pieces of the chair on the floor, none of them makes sense with the instructions that they’ve been given.

Now. Niki owns her own business and is Aurelian, she is not dumb, she knows a lot about strategy and planning and she has street smarts and she did pretty well in school. She is not dumb.

Aimsey is not either.

Now. Why can’t either of them figure this out?

Eventually it devolves into both of them laying against the front of the couch, lazily looking at the desk chair before looking back up at the roof again.

“I’m super excited for uni,” Aimsey says, for about the fifth time in five minutes. “It’s people who want to do the exact same thing as me, photography! And we’re all super excited—I met with some of the people in my dorm and,” they bounce up and down slightly, clearly excited.

Niki grins at that, “I’m glad, have you made any friends?”

“Oh yeah,” Aimsey murmurs, looking down at the instructions that they still haven’t been able to figure out, “I met this person at college, at one of the open days—”

“Oh?” Niki tries to hide her smile with her hand.

“Yeah!” Aimsey says, smiling a bit brighter, “And they’re super cool like she’s just so good at photography you know? The shots that she does are so fuckin’ creative and the way she

uses lighting and negative space and they don't even follow the rule of thirds— that's the most basic rule of photography and yet their images are amazing and I want half of their talent y'know—”

Niki nods and smiles. “What’s their name?”

“Gugqie,” Aimsey mumbles, “And— you know when you meet someone so amazing at something and you debate if you should really be there. Like why am *I* in those classes because they have photos of *heroes*. ”

“Techno wouldn’t mind if you used his face for one of your projects—”

Aimsey throws her arms up in the air and falls backwards so they’re laying on the ground, staring up at the ceiling and star sighs dramatically. “I’m just not good enough! When people like Gugqie are there—”

“You both submitted a portfolio,” Niki says, squinting at the instructions and trying to figure out what is what. “And you were both accepted.”

“But she’s just—”

“A student, like you,” Niki continues with newfound ease, “You deserve to be there Aimsey, I know how much work you’ve put in to be there, and I know it hasn’t been easy.”

Aimsey just looks at her.

“You said the examiners loved your portfolio, you said that one of them *gave you a recommendation* , which isn’t easy to do. Alright? That’s not easy to do and you just did it, and you are not allowed to understate your ability. You are one of the most talented, lively people I know.”

“Niki stop, I will cry,” they threaten.

“And your photography is unique, and you’re only so young— I know age isn’t everything, but you still haven’t done your formal training and you’re already so skilled and you’re going to keep building on that.”

“If you make me cry, I am going to be so mad. I’m going to be so mad, I’m telling you I’m gonna be so mad.”

“You deserve to be there,” Niki says, before smiling slightly. “I mean, you could always ask Guqqie to talk about photography over a coffee or something, find out what they’re doing.”

“No!” Aimsey screeches, “No, no, no— no, you’re evil and the worst, no, I will never be doing that, nope, no and also no.”

Niki laughs as Aimsey pushes her onto the floor and picks up a pillow from the couch, before attacking Niki with it. Niki laughs even harder as Aimsey attacks her with the pillow, apparently having no mercy as they do so.

Siblings, what can you do?

“You are the worst!” Aimsey yells, hitting Niki between every word. “You are the absolute worst, the complete worst, I literally hate you, I literally hate you.”

Niki laughs even harder, “Does she not like coffee?”

“I hate you, I hate you, I hate you.”

“Most coffee shops do hot chocolate!” Niki cries out, still laughing as she’s hit with the pillow. “Pasteries too, you can discuss photography or whatever nerds do.”

“I hate you!”

The door swings open.

Techno stands at the door, Floof in his arms.

He sets Floof on the floor and Aimsey is momentarily distracted by Floof. Star gasps excitedly and scrambles away from Niki and towards Floof.

“Floof Floofikins? Is that really you?” Aimsey says, before pulling Floof into a hug.

Floof looks a bit confused but otherwise fine.

“Hey, Niki,” Techno says casually like this is an everyday occurrence, he glances at the mess of the desk chair on the floor “Do you two need a hand?”

“No!” Aimsey yells, and Floof looks mildly annoyed at this sudden noise, “Why do they only do pictures—”

Techno pauses, putting his bag down on the counter and walking over to where Niki and Aimsey are sitting on the floor, trying to figure out how to put this desk chair together. He peers over Niki’s shoulder, then sighs.

“You have it upside down.”

“What?” Aimsey shrieks, “We do not, we do not— we literally do not—”

Techno grabs the paper from Niki's hands, before twisting it around and putting it on the floor between the two of them.

Aimsey seethes. "You didn't even finish elementary school!"

Techno turns around from where he's walking, before grabbing his bag again and reaching into it. He grabs something before pelting it at the back of Aimsey's head.

"Oi!"

It falls onto the ground, and Aimsey looks at it.

It's a bag of various sweet things, it looks like tooth decay in a bag.

Aimsey glares at Techno for a long moment, "You get a pass. You did just attack me."

"Because you're a knob—" Techno pauses.

Niki laughs, "You sound like Wilbur."

"Shut up." Techno murmurs, he moves so he's near the couch and calmly sits down. Floof manages to wiggle out of Aimsey's grip before jumping up onto Techno with a sense of calmness that Niki didn't even know Floof had.

Techno is probably Floof's favourite, not that she will ever admit it.

They're just... in tune with each other, it's very sweet.

Eventually, Aimsey and Niki manage to put together the chair, with only minor difficulty, and Niki promises if Aimsey needs any help setting up the other furniture that she can help with that.

“I mean Guqqie would probably help you,” Niki says and Aimsey starts screeching again, much to Floof’s displeasure, Floof looks up at Techno, the most disappointed expression on his face.

It’s almost funny.

Techno and Floof have the same expression on their faces as Aimsey screeches.

“Alright,” Niki says, grabbing Aimsey by the back of their hoodie and putting them on their feet. “Time to go, you have an assignment due in a few hours.”

Aimsey pouts, “I— yeah.”

“And you said it was important.”

Aimsey sighs, getting up on their feet and stumbling towards the door, muttering underneath their breath and picking up the chair.

Niki leads Aimsey out of the room, before saying their goodbyes and then closing the door.

Techno just looks at her.

“If you’re allowed two emotional support children, I’m allowed one.”

“I do not—”

“Tommy and Daniel,” Niki says easily, “You would adopt those two if they let you.”

“I don’t think Tommy is too happy with me right now.”

Niki looks at him for a while, trying to get any information out of his expression. He doesn’t give anything away and Niki wants to shake him because of the way he’s wording everything.

“Is Tommy okay?”

Techno shrugs.

“What does that *mean* —”

“Basically—” Techno starts, before his phone rings, almost conveniently so, and Techno sighs, reaching for his phone. He squints at the contact name curiously, and Niki can’t tell who it is because of the way his phone is tilted.

Techno sighs and picks it up, “Wilbur before you even open your mouth I am not apologising to Phil...”

A moment of silence and Niki decides now is the time to inspect her nails, something that she does casually.

“He was acting like you!” Techno says, “I’m not gonna just let that slide, and no that wasn’t an intentional attack on you, he just had a moment when I could *clearly* tell that you were raised by him—” a moment of silence as Wilbur probably talks, “No, I am not going in for questioning, why the fuck would I go in for questioning unless I have a death wish. I’m not gonna—”

Techno is cut off by someone on the other side of the phone yelling... something, and he just sighs, running a hand down his face and looking at Niki.

Niki gives him her best supportive thumbs-up gesture.

Techno flips her off.

Fair.

She goes back to what she's doing because she is a normal human person who has normal person things to do... things that aren't listening in on her best friend's family drama, even as interesting as it is.

Techno mutters several things under his breath, probably curses, before hanging up on Wilbur and looking at her. "I gotta go in."

"You just got home."

"Yeah, higher-ups have issues with me— again."

"Do they know you know who Theseus is?"

Techno shrugs, "Guess I will find out. Good luck."

Niki nods slowly, not quite sure.

He turns around and walks out.

“Hey, is Tommy okay—”

The closing door doesn't answer her question.

Aurelian sits on top of a building, on the other side of the building she can see Purpled chowing down on a burrito and apparently having the time of his life.

He's far enough away that Niki can't make out any features, and is fully aware that she's across the street.

Below them, people are protesting, as legally is their right to do. She sighs, wishing she had music right now.

It's a pretty peaceful protest, all things considered. Nothing's being thrown, which is always fun.

So she is essentially on holiday as she watches people down on the street below. It's packed with people with signs and banners and shouting.

In the middle, there's a bunch of people dancing and it looks like so much fun that Niki actually wants to join.

There are more than a few banners and signs with Theseus on them.

Niki's not sure how she feels about that.

Across the street, on the other side of the building, Purpled rapidly is waving his arms, which makes Niki look up.

Then he points to the front of the marching crowd.

Ah...

Yup, okay.

The invigilators, that's what they're calling themselves. Invigilators, the people specially trained in riot control and protest control and everything else the media states that the people of Upper L'Manberg should be scared of.

Both Niki and Purpled seem to see that this can go terribly badly, and they start sprinting.

They both run down their respective sides of buildings towards the front of the crowds.

Niki is the first one who beats the crowd. She scrambles for the grappling hook on her side, before shooting it at a building.

And like that she swings down, to land in between the riot control and the protestors.

Niki turns around and waves at the crowd behind her, who start cheering.

Cute.

She glances back up and Purpled is still standing on the building.

Cool, he's backup then.

"Hello," Niki says, voice modulator distorting her voice into one that's a bit crackly and deeper. "Now. We both know this is not a riot."

Yet.

Is what she doesn't say.

That wouldn't exactly look amazing for their chances if she's being completely honest. So she stands her ground.

She's not Theseus— no one is Theseus and she can't take down a patrol of riot control by herself.

But she has Logstedchire behind her—

Very literally.

It's not even a metaphor at this point, she straight-up does have Logstedchire behind her, which is always fun.

Niki takes a deep breath.

"I'm going to have to ask you, on behalf of these lovely people, to leave."

A silence settles over all of them.

Niki doesn't say anything for a long moment, she just faces the invigilators with a frown on her face.

Alright then.

She can deal with this.

She's a grown-up.

Barely.

"They are doing nothing wrong," she says, hands by her sides and clenched into fists. "They have a right to protest."

More silence.

Niki is really not a fan of this silence.

Then some idiot, decides it's an amazing idea to attempt to throw a water bottle at one of the cops.

It's not the worst idea.

It bounces off their head and onto the ground between Niki and the invigilators.

Although invigilators is a very strong word.

Niki squares her shoulders and refuses to move, she stands firm with her fists on either side of her, she will fight them if needed, she doesn't want to, but she will fight them and she will win.

She can feel Purpled's eyes on her from his vantage point on top of the building, his eyes feel heavier on her back than they should. She takes a deep breath, before looking the invigilators in the eyes.

She's not scared.

"We will have to ask you to leave," one of the invigilators says, stepping towards Niki, and that is their mistake. "We don't want vigilantes inciting violence as well as—"

They reach forwards for Niki's arm.

Niki reaches up with her arm that isn't being targeted and places her hand against the invigilator's temple.

Their legs crumble underneath them.

Oh, dear—

And that is when chaos breaks out.

Niki hits the floor and three bullets— hopefully, rubber, fly over her head, landing around the invigilators, or in their legs— Niki does not have the plan to wait and see what happens there.

"Thanks, Purpled!" Niki yells sarcastically, and in return, she's just vaguely aware of Purpled still on the roof flipping her off.

She gets back up onto her feet, and she starts running in the opposite direction—

Look she's not a coward, she's just not a fucking idiot.

She's not gonna Theseus it up in here and try to fight an entire squad of cops, she doesn't have that power and she's not even going to pretend she does. Her power lies in keeping other people safe, not needing to fight but instead defending.

Behind her, she's aware of various chaos, and Niki finds herself not caring until she manages to get up onto the doorway of one of the buildings littering either side of the street.

She uses her momentum to grab onto the edge of it and then drags herself up a bit higher, so she's standing on the side of the building, holding onto a pipe and hoping she doesn't fall onto the ground.

Purpled has somehow gotten over to the other side of the buildings, and grabs Niki's arm, pulling her up onto the ledge that he's standing on. Purpled huffs for a moment, clearly out of breath.

"You just—" Niki pants, also out of breath, "Shot three invigilators."

"They can arrest me for it," Purpled snarls, he picks up the sniper gun that he's holding and fires it again. It hits something and Purpled makes a noise. "I fucking hate sniper guns." He hits it against the wall.

Then he sighs, something does not appear to be working.

With little hesitation, he slings it over his back.

“Where did you even get a sniper—”

“Borrowed it.”

“From where?”

“Don’t worry about it,” Purpled says, narrowing down absolutely nothing at all. He reaches to his side and pulls out a much smaller gun, then a knife, and then he passes that knife to Niki.

“Where are you even keeping these?”

“Leg holster,” Purpled says, “One on my right for knives, left for guns.” He pulls out another gun from his left side and sighs. He swings them around, maybe something about weight? Niki’s never really used a gun before.

Purpled sighs again, grabbing an earpiece, “Allows us to communicate. What’s the plan here?”

“Why are you talking like a soldier?” Niki asks, a bit horrified, and a little bit impressed.

Purpled huffs, “What’s the plan, Aurelian?”

“Uh... protect the protestors.”

Purpled does something to the earpiece, before handing it to Niki. “It has a microphone in it, you don’t need to press it to talk, it’ll detect it automatically—”

“Who’s tech is this?” Niki asks, she’s not sure if she recognises it.

Purpled pauses for a moment, “Don’t worry about it.”

“Purpled, where are you getting this tech from?”

“If you break it somehow. There should be a button on it, that will contact me and allow me to assume you’re alright. If it gets smashed completely, like stepped on—”

“Who’s technology is this, Purpled?”

“Elysium,” Purpled snaps.

Niki blinks at him for a few moments, “Why the *fuck* do you have Elysium tech?”

Purpled pauses for a few moments, “We lost our tech guy a while back, Theseus and I, Theseus wasn’t concerned but I know what a lack of gear can do to someone. Especially at times like this.”

Niki pauses, “Who are you getting it off?”

“Huh?” Purpled asks, “Why does that concern you?”

“I... wouldn’t imagine you had connections in Elysium.”

“Only one,” Purpled mutters, “And Prime, I want to slit his throat sometimes,” Purpled shakes his head, “I pay well though so it doesn’t matter. Okay, so—” he holds out the earpiece again and Niki hesitates.

Then she takes it, putting it in her ear.

“Say something to it,” Purpled says.

“Hello, I am Aurelian?”

“It’s adjusted to your voice,” Purpled says, putting his own earpiece in, “Okay. Now, how the fuck do you protect protestors.”

“They need to know ways out, and we need to stop arrests from happening.”

“You lead ways out, I’ll stop arrests,” Purpled says.

Niki pauses for a second, before nodding.

Purpled turns around, reading to jump off the side of a building.

“Be safe,” Niki says.

And Niki can’t see Purpled’s face underneath the mask he wears, one that is much more impressive than Theseus’s, and clearly more secure. But she can imagine that he smiles because it’s evident in his voice.

“Aurelian, I may be Theseus’s friend, but I am way less reckless than him.”

Then he jumps off the side of the building.

Niki blinks for a moment, before sighing, and hauling herself up onto the top of the buildings.

There are a couple of exits around these streets, very easy ones, that lead into mazes of streets, and Niki is so glad she grew up around this area specifically, the nicest area of Logstedchire.

Because holy fuck the alleyways are complicated.

She jumps down, landing in front of a group of lost-looking people with signs.

Chaos is still erupting around them, people seem to be directly conflicting with invigilators, things are being thrown, she can see Purpled out of the corner of her eye, and it's just *so loud*.

“Run towards the shoe place,” Niki says calmly, grabbing the oldest one there— they look about twenty at the maximum. “There’s an alleyway to the furthest side of it, duck down that then make a right at the first shoot off.”

They nod at her.

“Up the fire escape, and into the apartment building and the entrance will lead onto Bird Street.”

“Alley at the shoeshop, right at the first shoot off, climb the fire escape, get onto the roof and then go out of the apartment?”

Niki nods. “Tell everyone you can, drop your signs in the alleyway.”

And that group shuffles off, grabbing the odd lost person as they basically run towards where Niki said to go.

She turns around, to see a teenager, who can't be too old, standing there and looking incredibly lost. She sprints for them, before grabbing them by the arm, the kid seems to be slightly aware because they swing for her.

"I'm Aurelian," Niki says over the shouting around her, "Do you want to get out of here?"

The teenager nods.

"Okay," Niki looks around. "There's an alley right behind you, go down that and do not stop. Tell anyone you can, or anyone who wants to leave, alright?"

They nod, before also running off.

Niki scans the crowds for a few more moments, it feels like the people who want to leave are leaving, and she takes a few steps back, watching as people sprint off in all directions, down the nooks of the alleys and disappearing back into streets around here.

Part of her worries if there are more invigilators set up at all the exit points, but none of these are the assumed exit points, and anything else would imply any of these people are smart, even in the slightest.

She glances up the front, Purpled is— for lack of a better word, fucking up any invigilator who tries to grab someone and attempt an arrest, which makes Niki both incredibly proud and a little bit horrified for the future of Purpled if he isn't careful.

Niki takes a deep breath.

She's not as good at changing someone's fear from a distance, but she can try.

She looks at one of the invigilators, one who is sneaking up on Purpled, as Purpled... pistol whips another invigilator. She takes a deep breath and tries to summon her energy, control her energy and focus it.

Focus the energy.

And sure enough, the man jumps out of their own skin (not literally, only figuratively.) and stumbles back, this allows Purpled to look up, before roundhouse kicking the invigilator in the face.

Nice.

Niki whirls around, someone's grip on her arm.

She knows it's an invigilator before she really sees them, she draws her arm back, jumping slightly and trying to break her arm free. However, this asshole has a pretty solid grip on her arm.

"Aurelian you are—"

Niki uses her other arm, and punches them in the side of the head.

They stagger backwards, and Niki touches her hand against their temple, and they crumple. Niki only half catches them, because she doesn't want an invigilator to smash their head on the ground and Niki being blamed for a death.

She looks around again, people are running either towards the invigilators or away from them...

Down the street.

Where a group of invigilators have shown up out of nowhere, and Niki can hear the yelling picking up. Hearing the panic, she can feel the panic, mass amounts of panic, that's how fucking strong it is.

Niki takes a deep breath.

Fear. She can control fear.

She can control her own fear.

She runs forwards, barrelling through the crowd, before bringing a hand up to her ear. "Invigilators at the other end of the street," Niki keeps pushing through the crowd, getting some insults thrown at her before they realise who she is. "They're arresting the ones trying to leave."

There's a loud breath in her ear, "*I'm a bit— busy,*" Purpled mutters, slightly crackly through the communicator, "*I'll—*" it sounds like something crashes on the other side. "*Be there— soon.*"

Right. Okay.

Niki's mostly on her own, chill, she can do this.

She... hasn't really stopped a group of twenty people before, but Theseus did it, and is she really going to let *Theseus* who is a mentally ill child— wait isn't Tommy about as old as her. He's nineteen—

Niki reflects on that for a moment.

Then she pushes past someone else and decides that's a problem for another time. She may not be Theseus, but she's not a complete idiot, and she can use her brain to figure this out.

She skids to the front of the masses of people, stopping in front of some invigilator.

They have the regular shields, the mask, and the unidentifiable features, she knows that it's hard to see through their goggles because they don't want you to be able to see identifiable features, they want invigilators to fight through everyone, with little focus on individuals.

Niki stands between them, breathing heavily.

Look. She has no idea what she can do.

She can calm a few people down, but that requires focus. She can probably calm down the invigilators, maybe to the point where they get tired and sleepy, but that requires focus she doesn't have.

"Stop," Niki pants out, "Whatever you're doing, stop, they are allowed to leave. You can not arrest them, it was an authorised protest, they're leaving, you're—" she stops to breathe, she's not even unfit and she's breathing so heavily. "Not allowed to—"

Look.

She's stalling.

She will be completely honest, she's stalling as she tries to figure something out.

There are a mass of people behind her, they can probably just plough through, but that could lead to a trampling, or more panic, or more violence that she doesn't think any of these guys want to get themselves involved with.

Niki takes a deep breath, shaking her head.

Focus.

She takes another deep breath, for good luck.

And she tries to focus on the energy of all the people standing in front of her, she tries to separate it out of the hundreds— well maybe not hundreds, but Niki has no way of knowing. She tries to separate it from everyone behind her.

It's difficult.

There's so much anger and fear in the air, and trying to focus on who is who, is difficult, her head spins as she tries to sort out the energy. She opens her eyes again, trying to refocus on the people in front of her.

And she *knows* when she's got the right energies, she can feel the buzz and the way her heart skips a step to match the energy of the people in front of her, as she tries to tune her emotions to theirs the best she can.

She smiles at them, "I think you might just need to calm down."

"Huh—"

Over half of them sway dangerously on their feet.

"Just calm down," she says evenly, walking forwards, her hands shaking from exhaustion and super focus. She can feel the energies in the air and she's shaking because of it, the anger and the fear and the grief and—

About three-quarters of them fall onto the ground.

“What the fuck?” Someone says.

Niki looks at the other few invigilators, her entire body is shaking and her head is cloudy from the effort she put in. She can still feel the energy in the air and she can’t stop that, she tries to calm herself down and—

She faces the other invigilators with a smile, ignoring the cloud in her head.

“I would recommend you move your co-workers out of the way,” Niki says carefully, “Unless they could get trampled.”

One of the invigilators grabs the gun from their side.

And that, that is when Niki kicks into gear.

She throws herself at the invigilator, knocking them to the ground, as chaos breaks out around them, with people running around them, as Niki and the invigilator wrestle for the gun on the ground.

Someone steps on her arm and she yelps, letting go of the gun, before she’s knocked onto the ground again, and a gun is pointed underneath her chin.

Oh.

Oh, shit.

“Give me one good reason I shouldn’t—”

Niki doesn’t have the energy to make him pass out as well, or rarely even calm him down, she barely has the energy to get herself up from the ground.

“Because we both know I’d be a martyr,” Niki spits as people run around them.

They’re both lost in the crowd, both on the ground and being ignored as people sprint to get out of here and out of possible arrest.

It’s just them, she supposes.

“We both know that I’d be a martyr and nothing is more dangerous than a martyr,” she keeps her voice level.

A moment of hesitation.

That’s all that Niki needs.

She reaches up with her hand, grabs the invigilator’s wrist, and yanks the gun away from her face.

The gun goes off.

For a moment everything rings and is slightly muffled, and Niki stops fighting for a moment.

Then she realises that her life is on the line, and that gives her motivation pretty quickly.

She swings her other hand at the invigilator, hitting them in the side of the head, as she still keeps a grip on their wrist.

Yanking away with her hand, she tries to pry the gun out of their hand.

She doesn't succeed, their grip is amazing.

They seem pretty determined.

Niki however, has a life she quite likes.

She likes her bakery, and she likes her friends and she likes her dog, and she likes being a vigilante and making a difference, she likes Sunday mornings when she can curl up in the sun and read whatever book she wants to.

She is determined not to die.

That boost of motivation must be what she needs, she yanks the gun out of their hands and it goes skidding across the ground.

Then she throws the invigilator off of her, and into a lamp post, something cracks, and Niki doesn't care to stick around to find out what it is.

The streets are much emptier, with fewer people around.

It appears all the invigilators have cleared out.

She heads back towards the other side, the one that was fighting last time she checked. Her breath is heaving, and her heart is beating incredibly fast as she walks forwards. She's still

shaking from the overuse of her powers and the fight she just had for her life.

Purpled is standing there, he has the sniper out again, and he's pointing it at an invigilator who has hold of someone's arm.

"Do it," Purpled says, "Arrest them. Try it."

"Thanks for the help," Niki pants, standing next to her.

Purpled's gaze flickers to her, "You look like shit."

"Funnily enough," Niki mutters, "That's what happens when you have a fight for your life."

"Reasonable," Purpled's eyes flicker back to the invigilator. "Let them go."

And they do, letting go of the person's arm, who stumbles back a little bit, before breaking out into a run for the other end of the street.

Purpled's gaze flickers over to the end of the street, "Did you clear that out?" He asks.

Niki nods.

Purpled seems to be shocked, although Niki can't see his expression. "What in the name of Ender?" He murmurs, taking a few steps, "How did you—"

Niki gives him a thumbs up, "I'm not sure if I can walk by myself," she says, "I drained all of my energy."

“I mean, when you put it like that, you’re kinda like a toddler.”

Niki sighs, adjusting her hood more, and trying to pin it in place again. “Purpled.”

“What?” Purpled says, putting the sniper back on his back, and scanning the streets, “I’m right y’know. Holy shit, that cleared out quickly.”

“Protests tend to do once busted,” Niki adds, “They’ll be back.”

“So will we,” Purpled responds, nudging Niki in the side, and Niki hisses at that.

Great, she’s busted her ribs as well.

“Hey Purpled,” Niki says, “Where— are you going to hide a sniper?”

“Hmm?”

“I mean, I’m assuming you don’t live alone...” Niki trails off, “Whether with parents or a roommate or someone else, where are you going to hide *that* ?” She asks, gesturing at the sniper rifle on Purpled’s back.

Purpled seems to consider this. “Probably under the bed.”

“What—”

“Don’t worry about it,” Purpled says, “Also give me the earpiece back, those are incredibly expensive.”

He holds out his hand.

Niki glances up at Purpled, and what she sees is slightly concerning. His hands are scraped along the knuckles, and his fingertips are torn open slightly. He doesn't wear gloves like the rest of them, so Niki can see the fact that his hands look torn up. Even his palms, they're torn up too, like he was fighting something and dragged his hands along the concrete. It looks painful as well, some of the scabs have been picked off, recently too.

Him moving as well has moved his hoodie slightly, and Niki can see... an ugly amount of bruising around his neck. Niki's been in the game long enough, she knows those bruises are hand marks, and she knows that it must hurt really badly. It might have been from patrol but —

"Holy shit, are you okay?" Niki asks.

"What?"

Niki gestures to his neck.

And like that, Purpled is putting his hood up and pulling on the drawstrings. "Fine," he says, "Patrol was rough."

Niki doesn't believe him, he realises with clarity.

She doesn't believe that.

But she also is aware that teenage vigilantes don't like to be pushed, and she knows that if she pushes too hard Purpled will run and have no one to turn to.

So instead of pushing, or asking, or anything else, Niki takes the earpiece out, handing it back to Purpled who sighs.

“Do you actually need help getting around?”

Niki pauses for a few seconds, she'll probably just take off the jumpsuit, she's wearing shorts and a shirt underneath, and she knows there will be some kinda bag in a dumpster nearby that she can chuck everything in and go back home.

She shakes her head, “Thanks for the offer.”

Purpled just nods, turning around before sighing at the thought of having to scale one of these buildings, “For what it's worth,” Purpled says casually, “You're a really good vigilante and a good person.”

Niki blinks at him.

She doesn't know Purpled very well, they've only worked together a few times.

But what she does know from talking to Techno and the few times that they've worked together is that Purpled just... doesn't compliment people easily, and when he does, he seems to mean it.

Before Niki can think of a reply, Purpled is clambering up a building like a spider.

Niki turns around and smiles to herself.

That's cool.

Maybe she should work with Purpled more.

There will be more protests, and Niki will have to defend more people.

She smiles to herself, before realising she'll have to face the long trek home, and that she'll need to find an alleyway with a bag that she can put her mask and jumpsuit in. She can do this, she's cool like that.

And hey, she's making a real difference...

That's about all Niki needs.

The rest of the next few days pass normally, Niki's ribs are bruised horribly, so she takes it easy. Not committing too hard to anything, she goes to hockey training, goes to work and only bakes on one of the days.

It's peaceful.

Niki is curled up on the couch, a book on her lap as she rests in the sun, Floof is sitting next to her, also lounging in the sun.

Techno decides that he's going to ruin the whole peaceful situation they have going on.

He shows up after his patrol, Niki can tell this because half of his hair is stuck to his forehead, he's wearing his new blade prosthetic, and he's still half in his gear. With the button-up shirt, but instead of the fancy pants he wears, he's wearing the ugliest shorts that Niki has ever seen.

Floof seems to run away, apparently deciding that he does not want to deal with this, and runs into Niki's room.

“Is that your own merch?” She asks.

Techno pauses for a few seconds, before looking down at the maroon shorts he’s wearing, and he nods. “Yup.” He drops his bag next to the door, before walking into Niki’s living room and flopping on her couch.

Niki pauses from the accounting things she’s doing, figuring out depreciation on bowls might kill her before she’s twenty.

“Bad leg day?”

“Awful,” Techno murmurs, “It’s all irritated, it hurt before I even got out of bed, and I hate everything, and blade prosthetics are normally for below-the-knee amputees and I am very much not that.”

“You should’ve cancelled on patrol,” Niki chides.

“Can’t,” Techno murmurs, “Everyone else is either injured, sick, or currently fighting with the higher-ups. Or they’re already getting offensively long shifts. Mine are still the shortest because of my leg and my powers still not quite being under control and—”

“Slow down,” Niki says, “I’ll find Floof Floofikins.”

“This is why you’re the best.”

With an eyeroll, Niki walks into her room. Where Floof is chewing on one of the very important papers that she needs. She makes a noise and picks up Floof. Who does not seem happy about the loss of his snack.

“Floof,” Niki scolds, “Do not eat my work papers.”

Floof just tilts his head at her, before making a small whimpering noise.

“Don’t try to gaslight me,” Niki mutters, “It will not work.”

She carries Floof out to Techno, who is still face down on the couch, bent in a way that does not seem comfortable at all.

“I hate everything,” Techno murmurs into the pillow, still managing to be incredibly deadpanned despite it all.

“I have your dog.”

“My attack dog,” Techno rolls over, before sitting up and looking at Floof. “My favourite idiot. This dog is so stupid.”

“Do not be mean to your son.”

“He’s stupid in the same way Wilbur’s stupid,” Techno corrects.

“Would you like water?” Niki asks, “You are concerningly sweaty.”

“I did just run around for like eight hours straight,” Techno mutters, “Wild how that happens. Running on a really sore leg and a new prosthetic. That’s *crazy* !”

Niki just sighs, wanting to hit her friend in the forehead, just a little before she goes to grab Techno some water.

That only takes a few moments and Niki hands Techno his water.

Floof has settled on Techno's lap, being the cutest dog in the history of dogs.

Techno sips at his water.

Okay.

Alright.

Time for Niki to say that she knows Tommy is Theseus, the conversation hasn't had a chance to come up yet, she's been busy and just forgetful, or Aimsey is around—

Why does Niki feel nervous about this?

Okay. She can do this.

She's great at speaking to people, she does it all the time, she works in customer service partly, she can do this. She can just... say what she needs to say so that Techno and herself are on the same page.

Subtly lead into the topic and then—

Nope.

Not doing that.

“I know Tommy is Theseus,” Niki blurts out.

Techno spits out his drink, right across the carpet, before looking at Niki with wide eyes. “I don’t know a Theseus— wait, oh shit.”

Niki laughs, “You are, *terrible* at lying. How have you kept this for so long?”

“Well no one’s ever fucking just... said it outright,” Techno says, wiping his face from the water he’s spilled by aggressively spitting it everywhere. “Uh... okay?”

Floof does not appear to be impressed by Techno spitting out his water everywhere, and jumps off Techno’s lap, before finding a particularly comfortable corner in the sun to curl up into.

“And I’m worried about him,” Niki says.

Techno sighs, “Join the line, currently, it’s consisting of me, Wilbur, Daniel and probably anyone who has ever seen Tommy sleep-deprived.”

“I had a conversation with him before I beat up Cicade, Whirlpool and Melicertes—”

“Oh, you are never going to stop bringin’ that up.”

“Nope,” Niki grins, “Sure— they may have put power handcuffs on me *and* I’m probably like on the heroes target list now, but that was worth it. Saved Tommy from getting captured, which was pretty cool of me.”

“Very cool of you, thanks for that,” Techno says, there’s a teasing tone in his voice, but Niki knows that he means it.

“And then, they slapped some cuffs on me and I *still* beat them.”

“What were the cuffs like?” Techno asks as Floof runs around like a little gremlin, hitting into things and not giving a single damn as he does so.

“Odd,” Niki says, “It just felt... off... like if someone had taken my body and moved everything a little to the left— which is a terrible analogy, but it works for now. It just felt *off*. It was super odd.”

“Seems odd,” Techno mutters, looking down at his hands, “You don’t feel your powers, do you?”

Niki blinks at him.

Feel... powers? That’s not a thing. Sometimes she can feel side effects but she doesn’t—*feel* her powers.

“What do you mean?”

“Like there’s no buzz, at the back of your head. Nothing telling you that you have powers, you just *know* that you have them. You don’t have a buzz or tingling in your hands. You just ___”

“Yeah,” Niki replies, “I know I have powers. They’re just a part of me, you’re not aware of where your arm is in space and time at every moment. You’re only aware of you’re arm when you’re doing something with it or something’s wrong.”

Techno hums. “They feel separate.”

“Huh?”

“My powers— feel like more than just an extension of me,” Techno murmurs, “It wasn’t like this until recently, it feels like... I don’t even know. My powers feel like more, I can’t describe it more than that. It’s just *more* , they do things for me without knowing it.”

“Your powers are strength— how does that—”

“I still have limits,” Techno sighs, “Yet to break through netherite, though I can make dents in it. Sometimes if I’m arguing with Wilbur or Phil or— even Daniel,” he laughs a little bit at that, and his face becomes a bit fonder.

No shot he’s pseudo-adopting another brother—

Where is Techno getting them all from at this point?

“It feels like more, the buzzing in my head gets louder. That’s not Chat, I can tell the difference between Chat and myself and... whatever the fuck this is, it feels like— it can make me stronger.”

“Huh?”

“Like— when things get intense in an argument, I feel stronger, and that’s not me and that’s not normal adrenaline— it’s something else.”

Niki looks at him for a long moment, “Look... you sound—”

“Interesting?”

“That’s a nice way of putting it.” Niki murmurs.

“Dunno,” Techno shrugs, “Ever since I got blued, I’m like hyperaware of my powers, they’re always there. The only time I didn’t have that was when…” Techno’s eyes drift over to the unlocked power cuff on the table. “That, that made me feel, odd.”

Techno sighs again, relaxing his shoulders before settling down on the armchair, bringing his non-prosthetic leg up so it’s folded underneath him. He puts his phone down and Floof appears to only just take interest in Techno’s general existence.

He jumps up onto Techno’s lap, spins around until he believes that he is comfortable and he settles down and closes his eyes.

“Sleepy,” Niki coos towards Floof.

Floof opens his eyes for a split second.

Niki did not know a dog could side-eye, until that exact moment.

“Do not coo at Floof, he is a guard dog, he is very dangerous.”

“He is a therapy dog, his job is to calm you down from panic attacks… and look cute.”

“An attack dog.”

“Techno I know he’s a therapy dog, I got him with you—”

“Can’t hear you over his aggressiveness.”

Floof snores.

It's a little bit cute.

Techno decides now is the time to pet Floof, so he does.

And Niki knows Techno rather well, the price of having known someone for years. And when he's anxious, or worried about something, he will just pet Floof, look off into the distance and pet Floof.

Which is fine, he's allowed to do that, but Niki sometimes lets herself wonder when she got to know Techno so well.

"You okay?" Niki eventually finds her voice.

Techno nods, but he doesn't focus back in and busies himself trying to detangle Floof's fur.

"What's up?" Niki pushes, because now seems like the time she needs to push. With Techno arguing with Wilbur and Phil, and Tommy not speaking to him, someone needs to push.

She seems like the only one who will.

Techno sighs, leaning his head back and running a hand down his face.

"Y'know how Wilbur's had all his mental health things over the years?"

"Duh."

Techno huffs again, “Tommy is being *remarkably* similar to Wilbur when Wilbur was about seventeen— like, very, very similar. The recklessness and then— I don’t even know, it’s just... worrying me.”

“Oh,” Niki whispers.

“I think,” Techno sighs, and he sounds incredibly tired and upset. “I think Tommy thinks he’s alone, I’m not sure if he knows how many people would risk everything they have for him. I know Wilbur would— even if he found out.”

“Really?”

Techno nods, “I know Wilbur, he doesn’t hate Theseus— not anymore, he’s scared of him. Anger is easier than admitting you’re scared. I know Phil would, he’ll never admit it but I know he cares for Tommy much more than he lets on. Quackity? Sapnap? Kristin? Purpled? Fuck I reckon even his roommates, that he seems to be fighting with or there’s *some* sorta tension there would do anything for him.”

“Tommy’s endearing, huh?”

“Incredibly,” Techno adds, “It’s so—”

And Niki gets to watch the way that Techno’s face lights up while talking about Tommy, she gets to watch the pride on his face and the smile that covers his face.

“Tommy is hilarious, and he’s incredibly stupid, and he’s incredibly brave— or maybe just doesn’t care. But he’s more socially aware than I thought and he just... excudes this sort of light around him.”

“Yeah?” Niki is still smiling, Techno’s energy is infectious.

“He’s— one of my favourite people,” Techno adds, “He’s so fucking funny, and— no, he is not perfect, I know that. But no one is perfect, as they’re human, and being human and perfect kinda contradict each other. But Tommy is— so incredible and he’s *so fucking loyal*. He might not think it, but he is, and he just... cares.”

“Cares?”

“He cares,” Techno says with a nod like that’s the end of it. “He might be reckless and impulsive, but he cares, at the end of the day. He’s cared that he’s hurting Wilbur by being Theseus since the start, he’s cared about Logstedchire for *years* . He cares about his friends and his family and— now I am rambling about Tommy, Prime I sound like Wilbur.”

“Wilbur rambles about Tommy?”

“Wilbur adores the kid,” Techno smiles, “And I think Tommy adores him as well. Tommy is surrounded by so much love, but he thinks it’s all fake because he’s had to lie to keep himself safe.”

“Is it not, then?”

“No,” Techno shakes his head, “It’s not fake, it’s not something that will just disappear at the drop of a hat. These people care about Tommy, and it’s... awful to see him think he’s alone.”

“He’s not alone,” Niki says, leaning her arms against the balcony, she glances at Techno, a smile on her face. “We know about Theseus, about all of Tommy, not just either face he puts on. He has us.”

Techno snorts, “We’re not much for company.”

Niki pauses, looking over the skyline, the sun starts to sneak behind the water and it looks stunning. The golden colour of summer covers the city, off in the distance Niki can hear chanting and yelling, it's the protests.

"I think we're alright," Niki says, "We do the right thing and we're surviving."

"The kid's only goal in life shouldn't be to survive."

"I think—" Niki hums, "I agree, but sometimes it's the little things, sometimes just surviving is what gets you to the next day, and then the one after that and the one after that. And after you survive for long enough, you start to make plans, want to change the world, wanting to... change it all."

Techno looks at her, "Pretty wise for a teenager."

Niki just sighs side-eyeing Techno.

"You're not even twenty yet."

"I am in like a week and a half," Niki mutters, and she smiles again.

"What do you want for your birthday?"

Niki looks at him, screwing up her nose, "Nothing, Techno, we've been through this."

"Well, I want to get you something."

"Then make it something I want."

“That’s why I’m asking you.”

“Do you not know me well enough to get me something yourself?” Niki teases, nudging Techno in the side, “You wanna know what I honestly want?”

“Yes.”

“Just— spending some time with you,” Niki says with a small laugh, “You’ve been so busy recently, and I know why and I get that, but I miss my best friend, and Floof misses you as well.”

“Floof misses me because I get him good dog food.”

“The dog food you get him is not *healthy*, Techno.”

“But he enjoys it,” Techno challenges, “I’m the cool parent. You’re the boring organic aunt who always talks about essential oils.”

“I will kill you.”

“Probably an art teacher too,” Techno continues, “With one of those skirts, like the colourful patterned ones, and that specific cardigan.”

“You didn’t even go to school, why do you know this—”

“I have learned significant things from my brothers.”

Niki laughs, “Wilbur—”

“Wilbur went to a private school for like all of his schooling, some rich boarding school as well.”

“Ah,” Niki sighs, “That explains why he’s like that.”

“I do think you two would get along,” Techno continues easily, “You take not a lot of shit and Wilbur speaks a lot of shit, it would be a hilarious dynamic.”

“He’s a hero.”

“So am I.”

“You’re different,” Niki mutters, “You’re a vigilante first.”

“I’m really not. Everyone keeps deciding that I’m a vigilante or a hero and not the other, and well— I still grew up around Wilbur and Phil, my accent only got stronger when Tommy showed up.”

“It was terrible,” Niki shudders, “Glad to see you have the correct accent, the iconic one.”

Techno rolls his eyes, before looking back out at the sunset and sighing.

He goes quiet again, and Niki knows that he’s thinking, that is a rather rare occurrence so Niki sits in the silence too, watching the sun steadily set as Techno figures out how to word whatever he wants to say.

She watches the district, smiling slightly at the gold that has covered the city.

Logstedchire has always been the most beautiful district, and tonight seems to confirm it. It's not perfect, with neat bushes and clean benches. It's messy and grimy, with dirt and scratches and it's flawed. Yet the sun washes over it with its golden hue, and Niki can't help but be a little bit more in love with her district.

It's a bit broken, and a bit flawed, but it's hers.

And it is so worth protecting.

"Sometimes..." Techno says, "Sometimes— it feels wrong."

Niki turns her head to look at him, and Techno keeps his eyes firmly on the skyline.

"Like— I'm from Logstedchire, born and raised, I have the accent and the whole questioning authority thing and the dry humour. But..." Techno runs a hand through his hair, it's getting longer again. "It doesn't feel like I really am, I'm not protesting this bullshit, I'm part of the problem in the hero tower and aware of it— and I threw away all my morals so I didn't face the consequences of my actions—"

"Techno you were fourteen and decided to assassinate a president," Niki deadpans, "You should not be beating yourself up over mistakes you made as I kid, I'm not, that's not fair on myself or on that kid—"

"Me and my fourteen-year-old self are the same thing."

"Are they?" Niki asks gently, "I don't think they are, I think you were very angry as a fourteen-year-old, I was too. I don't think you're as angry anymore, I think you've turned into someone that I'm glad is my best friend."

Techno hums.

Niki nudges him again, and this actually gets his attention. He looks at her and Niki smiles, “I’m glad I met you,” she says, “Alright? You’re— well a real hero, I suppose.”

Techno just looks at her blankly.

“You always do the right thing,” Niki says, “No matter the issue or the cost on yourself, and while that’s stupid, it’s admirable. And you are kind, and I am so glad I met you.”

Techno just shrugs.

Humble fucking bastard.

Niki rolls her eyes, “You’re the worst.”

“You’re the one still on my balcony, dunno what to tell ya.”

Niki huffs, hitting Techno in the arm and Techno winces.

Another moment of silence, the sun is basically done now, the Summer chill of a night settling over them. Techno crosses his arms and Niki leans back against the top of the railing, watching the lights flicker on.

Techno sighs. “I don’t know what to do anymore.”

Niki doesn’t even try to hide her surprise, she turns to look at Techno, mouth open. “But you always—”

“Know what to do,” Techno finishes, he sighs, dropping the weight of his head a little and looking down at the ground. “I know, everyone seems to think that— but I don’t know, I haven’t known for a long time.”

“You’re only one person,” Niki says, “You can’t hold the weight of everything by yourself.”

“Someone has to,” Techno says looking up at her.

And for the first time in a while, Niki really sees Techno. He looks more tired than usual, the bags under his eyes are more pronounced and his hair is ruffled, falling into his eyes. There are scratches on his hands and he seems to draw in on himself.

He looks so tired.

“Techno, you don’t have to handle this alone—”

“I do,” Techno hisses back, “I’m the only one who can handle my new apparent chronic pain caused by blue and the fact that fucks up my leg *even more* and I’m the only one who has any idea what Tommy’s going through and he won’t even talk to me! I’m also the one who fucked up between Wilbur and— he’s right and I can’t explain it to him and— I don’t know at this point, Niki. I just... don’t know anymore. Everyone in the tower is fighting all the time, the hero committee aren’t *saying anything*, they never do that!”

Niki frowns.

“And you and Tommy together took out six heroes,” Techno mutters, “Sure Ant, Shubble’s and Foolish’s injuries are minor but— this is just two people, the heroes are supposed to be infallible to the public.”

“Well you’re not,” Niki retorts, she tries to keep the bite out of her tone and inevitably fails. “The heroes are known for being against Logstedchire—”

Techno laughs, although there's no humour in it.

"You'd think that," Techno mutters.

"Huh?"

"There have been so many discussions, would people defend the cops from protestors— would they defend protestors, would they help arrest someone who resisted at the checkpoints," he looks up at Niki, and he smiles, "And what terrifies me is that most of them don't fucking agree with the decisions being made."

Niki freezes. "Huh?"

"My entire life it has been Logstedchire against authority, the heroes, the government, everyone," Techno runs a hand through his hair, "Then like— Tommy shows up and suddenly they're considering their morals and most of them disagree with the hero committee and that is terrifying."

Niki just watches him for a few moments.

"For my entire life," Techno says, "It's been black and white, it's been Logstedchire against everything. Logstedchire were the good guys, and everyone else was the bad guys— and that just made it so much easier to think about. But of *course*, the heroes aren't agreeing with anything now, we're no longer teenagers who are as easy to manipulate. Of course, most agreed when they were sixteen— they didn't know better."

"They know better now?" Niki doesn't even try to keep the doubt out of her voice.

"I think so," Techno sighs, "And that's terrifying. It is *terrifying* to know that so many of the heroes will just— disagree with the committee. That's terrifying."

“Why?”

“It gets you killed.”

“You’re fine and you disagree with them, quite publicly.”

Techno shakes his head, “I’ve been threatened more times than I care to remember... pretty sure they have a Pandora’s cell with my name engraved on the wall or something. I just mean something to Phil and Wilbur— that’s why I’m really still around, outlasted my use as a healer, I can’t heal a fucking paper cut if I tried.”

Niki looks at him for a long moment, “You think they’re gonna... do anything?”

Techno shakes his head again, “I mean too much to the people there, I’d like to hope at least. I’ll be fine. They won’t do anything to me and I won’t do anything to them.”

Niki pauses, and she looks up at Techno. “What if they went after Tommy?”

“Huh?”

It's quiet for a moment as Niki tries to figure out how to articulate what she wants to say.

“I mean— Tommy clearly means a lot to you and Wilbur and Phil, basically everyone in the tower adores him. If... they wanted to send a message, or make you listen to them if someone wanted to be heard...”

Techno looks horrified like the realisation has suddenly sunk in. Like he hasn’t considered before someone using Tommy against them and using him as some sort of leverage.

"Then— someone can grab Tommy, and you will listen to their demands."

"I would," Techno murmurs.

"You'd do anything to keep him safe," Niki adds, looking out across the city. She thinks of Aimsey and, she understands.

According to the public, Tommy is just a beloved social media manager, an easy target and one that will do a lot of damage if anything happened to him.

He's the perfect target for multiple groups.

Techno looks like he's going to throw up. "Oh Prime," he mutters.

Niki watches him for a few more seconds before looking back out over the darkened city. "Tommy will be okay."

Techno doesn't answer her for a few seconds, "I'm not so sure anymore."

And they leave that conversation at that.

George sighs, phone against his ear, "Sapnap, I'm telling you that you should just *ask* why Quackity is being jittery."

"But what if he wants to break up!" Sapnap yells.

George sighs, running a hand down his face as he walks towards the elevator brushing hair out of his face.

“Then that’s a conversation that you want to have sooner, rather than later. It’ll be fine, Quackity still adores you, I know because I have to deal with his pining.”

“Georgeeee,” Sapnap whines, “He’s worrying me, and Karl as well— he’s been just— off for a couple of months, and I really am worried because what if he’s not happy anymore and if he doesn’t wanna be with me or Karl or whatever that’s fine, but we want him to be happy and —”

The elevator opens and George steps into it, he adjusts his goggles before deciding to take them off completely, he’s still warm for running around in the middle of the day, and his top sticks to his back.

Charming.

“Maybe he got a secret cat,” George deadpans. “Please just talk to him, it will clear the air, no matter what it is— communication is important and all that.”

“Bold words coming from the man who has never communicated with anyone literally ever.”

“I’m not in a relationship.”

“You’re supposed to communicate with your friends too,” Sapnap deadpans.

The elevator doors open and George steps out, “I gotta grab something from my office, I’ll be at your place in maybe half an hour? Depends on how much the traffic lights want me to suffer at every intersection.”

A moment of silence, and there's something mournful there.

Sapnap takes a deep breath, and it shudders in his chest slightly. *"Everything's really gone to shit, between Theseus and Logstedchire and— well everything else."*

George nods slowly, even if Sapnap can't see. "I'll be over in a while, don't die in the meantime."

"Wasn't planning on it you British—"

George hangs up, laughing to himself as he walks down the hallway towards his office. Just has to grab a letter and then he will be on his way, maybe get some sorta food because Sapnap can only make like three things.

He swings the door open, barely even looking up from his phone.

Okay so the routes and schedules for their shifts for next week have come out and— it's not looking amazing for Techno, he's been back at work for... like a week and he's being put on just about twice every day.

And George has another twenty-hour shift.

Surely that's illegal?

Someone clears their throat.

George looks up from his phone.

It's Sam.

He's standing there, leaning against George's desk with an envelope in his hand, an envelope that clearly has George's name written on it in neat handwriting. The top of the envelope has been ripped off.

Sam is also holding the piece of paper that was inside the envelope.

That's where the real problem lies.

George ignores the lump in his throat.

This had gone off without a hitch every other time, why now—

Sam puts both the envelope and paper on the table, before crossing his arms, "I will be completely honest, I expected it to be Techno before I expected it to be you."

George nods, gritting his teeth and turning one of his hands into a fist, he knows his knuckles have gone white because of how tightly he's holding his hand.

"I should report this."

Sam picks up the pin on the table, the little flower pin that was in the letter. He throws it up in the air before catching it again, and George can feel his stomach sinking more and more as he stands in his own office.

"You should have reported me when I was fifteen and hacked into the system to change my entrance scores," George replies.

His voice has taken on the typical Upper L'Manberg calmness, the dull voice and expression, when inside its anger. It's anger and fear and an ugly combination of everything else in

between.

He can not let Sam know that he's terrified.

Sam seems to consider this for a moment, "You were too useful to lose when you were fifteen," Sam pushes up off the desk and walks towards George. "So my suggestion..."

He moves so he's in punching distance.

George would like to knock out his fucking teeth.

Sam smiles, "I suggest you make yourself useful again."

"What do you want?" George snaps, he steps away from Sam, breathing not quite even.

"Just some help," Sam says casually with a shrug, "Just a couple of things, people who need to be put in their place, some... new code for Henry." That makes him smile in almost a sickly way.

And at the end of the day—

George is no hero.

He's pretended to be, but he's never been a hero. He lied and cheated his way into this job, and he knows that there's a side that he wants to be on— but that's the side that gets him into the most trouble.

So George takes a deep breath.

Then he holds out his hand for Sam to shake.

Sam shakes his hand, smiling, “Wise decision George.”

And George hopes that Sam knows how much he wants to shoot a bullet into his chest and watch him bleed. George hopes that Sam understands the moment he doesn’t have a reason to stay here, to let Sam win...

Sam signed his own fate.

It seems like he has too.

“That’s not how you do it!” Aimsey snaps.

“I’ve been baking with Niki since before you were born—”

“I’m eighteen you hero fuck—”

“Yeah, and Niki always egg washes the pastry, because it becomes more golden, and who doesn’t want golden pastry.”

“It’s puff pastry!” Aimsey argues, “It’s already gonna gold up, Techno one of us works in a bakery and the other one is a superhero, one of us—”

“Knows what we’re doing?” Techno finishes, “Yeah, and it’s not you.”

Both of them stop their arguing and turn to face Niki, who is sitting at the counter, watching their bickering amused. They've both forgotten a step.

"You have both been making sausage rolls with me for years," Niki deadpans, leaning against the wall to her right, resting her head against it. "How do neither of you know what to do at this point?"

"You always take over," Aimsey grumbles.

Niki just smiles, "You two can work together, I believe in you."

Techno and Aimsey both side-eye each other.

Aimsey sighs, "Well using an egg wash has no negative side effects. Go crack an egg into a bowl and find the brush thing, also whisk the egg you daft—"

"I will Spectre you," Techno murmurs underneath his breath, but he seems to know this isn't one he will win, because he stomps over towards the fridge, finding all the things Aimsey has asked of him.

Aimsey leans across the bench towards Niki. "Niki," she stage-whispers, "What's the thing we forgot."

Niki smiles, leaning towards Aimsey. "Gotta make a cut in the top of them, so they don't explode."

Aimsey gasps, and scrambles to find a knife to cut a small line in the top of each one, to stop them from exploding, and also generally makes them look better. Niki smiles to herself, it's always nice to see two of her favourite people interacting...

Even if they keep arguing over everything.

But hey, Niki is pretty sure Tommy and Techno used to be the same way, so she can hold out hope that they won't try to beat each other up.

Eventually, they both manage to do the egg wash *and* cut the slit in the top of the sausage rolls, and Niki feels very proud of both of them. They can now both make like— two whole things.

Baby steps.

Really, really, really baby steps.

Eventually, the three of them sit down in front of the TV, Aimsey talking non-stop about some animated movie that they've wanted Niki to watch for a while.

Aimsey eventually turns to Techno who gives a deadpanned expression.

"You remind me of Peter B. Parker," Aimsey decides, eyes flicking back to the TV, "A bit deadpanned, a bit of a mess, but you're good at what you do, and you're a pretty good role model."

"Thanks?" Techno says, looking back at the TV.

"I wanna be Uncle Aaron," Niki says, because Uncle Aaron is the coolest character in the entire movie, she's decided just now.

Aimsey winces, "Uh— I have bad news about Uncle Aaron."

Niki looks at Aimsey. “What.”

“Uh... keep watching?” Aimsey says, looking back at Techno with something very nervous in his eyes.

Niki’s eyes flicker back to the movie.

“So,” Aimsey drawls, “You know Theseus?”

Techno laughs at that, actual amusement playing on his face, “Yeah?”

“Is he an asshole?”

“He was younger than you when he started.”

“Younger than me!” Aimsey shrieks, looking at Techno with wide eyes, “Younger than— Niki why can’t I be a vigilante? Both you and Theseus were younger than me when you started!”

“Because Theseus is very mentally ill,” Niki doesn’t take her eyes off the TV, instead looking at the art style of the movie because *holy fuck* it is stunning, it’s so different to anything that Niki has ever seen.

“Well is that *because* he’s a vigilante or just because of him?” Aimsey asks, looking at Techno. “Wait do you know his identity?”

“Yup.”

“What?” Aimsey throws her head back against the seat, “That’s so cool— is he still in school? How does he balance school and vigilantism because neither of those are easy? Does he have telekinesis?”

“Mhmm,” Techno nods, “We believe energy manipulation.”

Aimsey thinks about that for a few moments, “Isn’t... everything energy manipulation?”

“Yes, yes it is,” Techno says.

“Does that make Theseus all-powerful?”

“I think he’s scared of his own powers, Aimsey,” Niki adds.

Aimsey huffs, leaning back in their seat.

“Do you have powers?” Techno asks.

Aimsey nods.

Niki facepalms.

“It’s just Techno!” Aimsey says, “Dude— he’s keeping Theseus’s identity secret, if he says anything I can just use that. I can just use that, and then everything’s fine, everything will be fine.”

Niki goes back to watching the movie, curled up with a blanket around her shoulders as Aimsey and Techno chat.

“Telekinesis!” Aimsey says proudly, “It’s a bit freaky actually, like when Theseus started having his super strong powers because mine kinda look like that. I don’t have like the spark effect, but I have red swirly things.”

“You do?” Techno sits up a bit straighter, looking at Aimsey, with actual interest in his eyes. “Do you know where those powers would originate from?”

“Uh…” Aimsey hums, “My grandma was a— she called it a demon, I know there’s an actual word for it though, wither skeleton, I think— but she was super far related, I’m closer related to blaze hybrids than wither skeleton, my cousin Manny, he’s a blaze hybrid but he got none of the cool powers, he just can not stand the cold and can like, heat up tea.”

“Huh,” Techno hums.

“Why d’ya wanna know?” Aimsey asks, attempting to poke Techno in the arm, and Techno swats their hand away without even looking away. “Did I just aid a hero? Wait, no— I don’t wanna help—”

“You may have helped Theseus,” Techno says.

Aimsey’s mouth falls open, “Wait, can’t I be arrested for that—”

“I won’t tell anyone if you don’t?” Techno suggests.

Aimsey grins at that.

A timer dings somewhere, and Aimsey is the one to respond to it, standing up and running over to the oven to get the now-cooked sausage rolls out of the oven.

The oven is working its hardest, as it's not a very good oven, it means the exhaust fan is running and the kitchen, in general, is very loud. It means the movie is turned up quite loud over the noise of the kitchen.

Niki smiles, looking at Techno.

Techno meets her eyes. *'What?'* He seems to say.

"You're such a big brother."

Techno sighs. "Still the youngest out of Wil and I."

"Only by a couple of months. You look at someone slightly younger than you and decide you're going to adopt them. Aimsey, Daniel, Tommy, probably Purpled the vigilante as well. That's four kids."

Techno scowls at her.

"Wasn't your first reaction to finding out Theseus was most likely a kid to go and find him and protect him from Phil and Wilbur?"

"I think you're too caught up on details."

"Aww," Niki coos and Techno rolls his eyes, "You're such a big brother. Do you have apple slices on you at all times? Water bottles?"

"You just make me sound like the mum friend."

"Oldest brother, mum friend, it's the same thing," Niki waves a hand dismissively.

Techno just sighs.

“You probably have bandaids on you—”

“Well duh, who doesn’t?”

Niki laughs, rubbing her hands together as she does so. “You *are* such a big brother. You’re up to at least three kids! Aimsey, Daniel and Tommy, and the media claims Philza is the serial adopter.”

“Well, according to the media he’s adopted three kids.”

Niki doesn’t have the time, nor the brainpower to think about that too much, especially considering Aimsey runs out of the kitchen, throwing himself over Techno, so he lands in the gap between Niki and Techno.

She manages to elbow Niki in the thigh, and kick Techno in the chest on her way down onto the spot.

“Sorry ‘bout that,” Aimsey does not sound sorry about that at all, “This is one of my favourite bits, the Prowler chase is so good.”

“Who even is the Prowler?” Niki asks, “Do we find that out or?”

Aimsey pauses for a few moments, “So you know that bad news I told you about Uncle Aaron?”

“*WHAT?*” Niki shrieks.

And Techno and Aimsey both burst into laughter, Aimsey holds at her stomach as she laughs and Techno covers his mouth trying to stifle his laughter with no success.

It's nice.

That's the long and short of it.

Being with Techno and Aimsey is just nice.

They watch the rest of the movie, and Niki cries a lot because it's an amazing movie, and also emotional, and the leap of faith scene might be the best scene ever put to screen, and she means this so seriously.

The day wraps up, they eat their sausage rolls, and Aimsey heads out with a hug for Niki and a half-hug for Techno which he panics about and doesn't quite know what to do with it.

(But big brother instincts take over and he hugs them back. And when Niki tells him that, he pretends that he's not happy about it.)

"Protesting tomorrow?" Techno asks, shrugging on his jacket for no reason, he has to step about three steps down the hallway. It makes zero sense, but Niki knows better than to question when Techno is having a Techno moment.

"Yup, Aimsey made the protest sign with some of her school friends, I think a bunch of them are planning on going as well."

Techno nods, "Make good choices."

"I always do."

Techno pauses by the door for a moment, “Aimsey has strong powers.”

“I know.”

“The hero committee is hiring right now,” Techno says, “Although hiring is a strong word when most of them will be younger than eighteen. They realised they need more heroes after two vigilantes took out six of them.”

Niki nods. “Okay.”

“Make good choices,” Techno adds again, and Floof seems to be aware it’s time to leave because he trots up to Techno, and Techno picks him up. “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.”

“You are a terrible example—”

Techno shrugs and walks down the hallway.

Aimsey smiles to herself.

Life is good.

Niki has been to a fair share of protests.

Fuck, she was at one not too long ago, but it is so much scarier when you’re on the ground, unable to use your powers, and instead, you have to follow along with what everyone else says.

Aimsey is holding a picket sign, with a big red lightning bolt on it.

It says all it needs to.

Aimsey is leaning against the sign slightly, grinning at the person standing in front of them. All Niki has been able to figure out, is that this person has pink hair and is talking to Aimsey like they know him.

It might be Guqqie, but Niki doesn't want to assume that every pink-haired person Aimsey appears to enjoy talking to is Guqqie, instead, Niki just watches, amused as Aimsey talks excitedly.

Judging by the hand movements Aimsey is talking about something photography related.

Niki walks over, glad to have found Aimsey, she grabs Aimsey by the shoulder, and they jump, turning around to face Niki and their entire face brightens up in a way that is incredibly endearing. "Niki!"

"Aimsey!" She responds in the same tone.

"Niki, this is Guqqie," Aimsey says excitedly, "Guqqie, this is my emotional support pseudo-sister, Niki."

"I'm not completely sure if you're using that word right," Niki adds.

Aimsey pauses, turning around to face Niki and then sticking out their tongue. Niki rolls her eyes.

"Nice to meet you," Guqqie says with a smile, "Aimsey has talked about you."

Aimsey's face drops. "I have not, I have not— you are a liar, I have not, I would— I have not!"

"What about when I asked about your chair and you went on an hour rant about how amazing Niki is?" Guqqie questions and they're still smiling slightly, as they make eye contact with Niki.

Ah, Niki knows that look.

It's the look when you both know you're about to make fun of someone, in a light-hearted way of course.

"Awww," Niki coos, "You talk about me?"

"I do not."

"*Aimsey!*" Niki says, "Awww, you talk about me. That's so sweet! *Aimseyyyy.*"

"I hate you."

"Aimsey!" Niki hugs Aimsey around the shoulders, pulling her in for a half hug, and Aimsey keeps a deadpan expression but leans into the hug a little bit. "You talk about me?"

"I hate you, I hate you, I literally hate you— I hate you—"

"Why are you leaning into my hug then?"

Aimsey makes an upfronted noise, and pushes Niki away, taking a few steps away and then glaring at Niki with enough fury to perhaps melt through netherite, however, Niki is used to these glares—

She has a dog who loves glaring at people like he's dreaming of killing them.

So, she can handle some of Aimsey's rage.

"I think the march is starting soon," Guqqie says looking around, and sure enough people are starting to become a bit more organised, and people are all starting to face the same direction. "I'm gonna be with some of the other students, if either of you would like to join?"

Niki looks at Aimsey, waiting on stars answer.

"Nah," Aimsey says, which shocks Niki, "First protest, Techno—"

"Techno?" Guqqie repeats, "Like— like superhero Techno?"

"Uh..." Aimsey looks at Niki, "He lives in her apartment building. But we were talking and apparently for things like this, especially if it's your first time at a protest, but it's better to be in a smaller group."

Guqqie nods, seemingly understandingly, she pauses for a few moments.

Aimsey pauses too.

Neither of them really seems sure of what to do.

Then Guqqie reaches forwards for a hug, and Aimsey returns it.

“Stay safe,” Guqqie says, “It’s only a march so it should be fine but—”

“Invigilators,” Aimsey finishes. “Stay safe as well.”

And Guqqie walks off into the crowd, still holding a sign and Aimsey watches as they leave.

“Wow.” Niki deadpans.

Aimsey jumps and turns around, “What?” Xe asks.

Niki just laughs, “Guqqie seems very nice.”

Aimsey pauses for a few moments, before picking up their sign and hitting Niki on the head with it, not overly hard, but it’s enough to make Niki laugh so hard that she doubles over, clutching her stomach as she laughs.

They both figure it’s time, and they try to make their way against the wall, Aimsey has a hold of Niki’s wrist so they don’t lose each other in the crowd, and they stay connected. Eventually, they find the side of the street and both settle themselves near it.

“No powers,” Niki says, looking around, “Too many news cameras around.”

Aimsey pauses for a moment, “But, Niki—”

“Don’t be seen,” Niki returns.

Aimsey just gives a smile about that.

Then a moment of pause, and Aimsey's eyes drift up to the buildings, to the alleys and the nooks that are along this road, the one that both of them know quite well. It appears people have learnt from the last time.

There are invigilators in the alleys and on the roofs.

Shit.

They weren't supposed to do things like *learning* .

Niki's stomach drops, if only a little and she grabs onto Aimsey's arm, pulling them closer.
"No powers."

"What?"

"Not for you," Niki hisses back, "Look up and around, there are eyes everywhere, do not use your powers."

Aimsey scowls but seems to agree.

The march starts and Aimsey seems to lighten up at that, their posture becoming more carefree, as Aimsey waves their sign around and chants.

They move slowly, as tends to happen when a mass group of people are trying to move anywhere. And Aimsey seems more than excited yelling out all the chants, and cheering when people speak and—

Xe seems elated as they move around the area, grabbing onto Niki with bright eyes at points and Niki will say whatever chant they're doing or scream whatever they're screaming about,

or boo when required.

Despite the eyes of invigilators on them they keep marching down the street, even with the invigilators along all the sides. Aimsey's shoulders tense up whenever they pass one of them.

Niki sticks a bit closer to Aimsey and scans them.

At some point, Niki notes one of them reaching down to the communicators that they have on their uniforms. The boxy things strapped to the side, partly netherite so they can't be broken.

It seems that their gaze is on one group of people in the middle of the crowd.

And Niki knows that won't end well.

So she tries to channel the energies into something that she can focus on, right next to her she can feel Aimsey's energy, nervous and excited, she tries to focus on the energy that she thinks is the invigilator about to make someone's day so much worse.

She manages to grab the energy, she thinks so at least and flips it.

The invigilator wobbles.

Niki takes a deep breath.

They slump against the wall they were standing against.

Niki sighs and looks back at Aimsey who looks confused. "What did you just do?"

“Dunno,” Niki says with a smile.

“How come you’re allowed to use your powers—”

“Because I’m older.”

“The *fuck* ?”

Niki scans the crowd again, eyes darting back and forth.

What perhaps shocks her the most is all the Theseus signs on the posters, maybe that’s what throws her the most. There are... *a lot* of them, with full-on illustrations, phrases involving him, to little stick figures with red lightning coming out of his hands.

Something about that makes Niki feel...

Sad.

She thinks that’s what it is, just... sad.

Because she’s talked to Theseus— Tommy, whatever the difference is, it doesn’t seem to matter. And... Tommy said he didn’t want to *be this* . He was just trying to do the right thing.

And as people chant about Theseus’s resistance and scream about freedoms while waving signs that have Theseus on it.

Niki feels like Theseus has outgrown Tommy.

In fact, she knows it has.

And that... that does make her feel upset, that Tommy has become this thing that he doesn't want to be. He didn't ask for this, no one really asks for this.

As she looks across the signs she sees a few purple flowers painted onto things, none of them mentions Elysium by name, it appears they're all smarter than that. But the symbol feels clear.

The people of Logstedchire stand behind Theseus and Elysium.

"What do you think of Elysium?" Niki asks, watching a sign of Theseus with a purple flower crown being waved around.

"Huh?" Aimsey asks, looking away from whatever he was looking at. "Oh, um— they're okay," she says, "They do... good, I suppose."

"That's a really cagey answer."

Aimsey pauses for a few moments, "It feels like they're the only organisation that's ever given a shit about Logstedchire."

Niki considers that for a few moments.

And... yeah.

"What about you?" Aimsey asks, "What do you think of them?"

Niki's eyes are still on the same sign, squinting slightly, the flower crown... it implies Theseus and Elysium are working together, or represent the same thing, and she doesn't think that's correct, even in the slightest—

“Niki?”

“Oh, sorry,” Niki shakes her head, “I agree with you. They seem like the only people who care.”

“Sometimes violence is the only way to get a message across,” Aimsey adds.

Niki turns to Aimsey, eyes wide, “Since when did you start thinking that?”

Aimsey goes quiet, tilting their head towards the floor as they keep walking.

“Aimsey, what do you mean?”

Suddenly they all stop.

It appears they hit a wall of invigilators.

Niki manages to peer over the top of most of their heads. There is a wall of invigilators blocking the street, behind them appears to be some sort of black van with tinted-out windows.

That's not looking good then.

Niki tries to bite down the panic that hits her straight away.

They're going to try to grab people.

Niki glances up to the buildings, she can't see Purpled with his trusty sniper.

Okay.

They're on their own then.

Up the front appears to be a head of pink hair.

Aimsey seems to take note of that, and Niki can almost feel the fear radiate off of them. They give each other a look, and Niki nods, before they start trying to fight their way to the front of the crowd.

"Oh, a shocker!" Someone at the front of the crowd, not Guqqie, deadpans, sarcasm clearly dripping off of their tone. "Some invigilator, probably someone who hates the poor is here to fight with a lawful protest."

That, for some reason, seems to get laughs out of people.

Look either Niki's sense of humour is not as broken as she thought, or it just... was not funny.

Aimsey grabs her by the wrist as they keep fighting their way through the crowd, most people move to let them past, seeing the urgency on Aimsey's face and the concern on Niki's.

"This is a lawful protest," someone says, again not Guqqie, but not the same person who spoke before. "One of us standing here is doing so with authorisation, and I do not believe that it is you."

Aimsey elbows someone out of the way.

Niki mumbles an apology as she passed them, they don't seem too impressed, but it seems to work well enough.

"This assembly has more people than authorised," one of the invigilators say.

"Yes," and that's Guqqie's voice— and Niki can feel and see the panic rise in Aimsey, just a little bit. "And I think that's because there are about fifty invigilators here, y'know."

A moment of silence.

And one of the invigilators does not seem enthused by the sass awarded to them, even as Aimsey and Niki laugh to each other, and Aimsey looks incredibly proud of Guqqie, who is only just ahead of them.

"You must disband this assembly immediately," the invigilator says.

"What are you gonna do?" Someone near Guqqie deadpans.

That seems like a challenge.

Niki knows that this isn't going to go well before anyone even moves. A lot of the invigilators are powered, and the ones who aren't, have ridiculous amounts of training, so they can beat people up better.

Then the invigilator, the one that Guqqie and the people near her have insulted, moves behind them.

And picks up one of the black trucks, like it's a pillow, rather than an incredibly heavy vehicle.

Then they throw it.

At the crowd.

Niki's heart drops to the bottom of her stomach, as several people try to shuffle either side, running and screaming as time seems to slow.

The car flips over itself in the air.

And Niki notices Aimsey moving before she can do anything about it.

Aimsey shoves their way closer to the front, before throwing both of their arms out in front of them.

The world seems to slow, once again.

The car stops itself mid-air, surrounded by wisps of red magic that surround the car, almost like a net.

Aimsey seems to know what they've done.

Their powers falter, but Aimsey seems to realise something that Niki doesn't, and they launch the car down the street, where it hits the ground and rolls and rolls and skids along the ground, before ending upside down on the road.

Aimsey takes a deep breath.

“You would’ve killed people,” Aimsey whispers, voice low and even, “You would’ve fucking killed people!”

There are cameras pointed at them.

Niki doesn’t care about that right now, that several of them, probably including Guqqie, Aimsey and herself could have died if that car actually hit them. Because Aimsey is in trouble and—

Niki fights her way through the few layers of people, shoving past Guqqie and not even feeling slightly bad about it.

She grabs Aimsey’s arm and yanks them back towards the crowd.

An invigilator grabs Aimsey.

Aimsey’s eyes go wide.

Niki can’t even hear the chaos around them, right now it’s just Aimsey and Niki and the fact that this won’t end well, but Niki can try, she can try and—

Aimsey is yanked backwards and lets out a scream.

Niki tries to tighten her grip.

Aimsey is yanked out of her grip, they reach forwards again, fingertips brushing, but neither of them can get a grip.

Then Aimsey is yanked up by an invigilator, and Niki rushes forwards, ready to fight and throw everything away— she will do everything in her power to save Aimsey, she doesn't care if her identity as Aurelian is revealed, she doesn't care if she gets hurt, she doesn't care —

A grip tightens on Niki's shoulders, and she's dragged backwards.

"No!" Niki yells, trying to fight both of them off, "Aimsey!" She calls out.

"Niki!" Aimsey calls back, as Aimsey is dragged backwards and towards the invigilators and towards the police or the hero tower or whatever they need a teenager with powers to do.
"Niki, help!"

That gives motivation, and Niki manages to elbow one of the people grabbing onto her shoulders, and she manages to take another step towards Aimsey and the invigilators that are dragging him further and further away and—

Aimsey keeps shrieking as he is dragged backwards, against the ground, they thrash and fight and scream and everyone can only watch as she's dragged towards the cars, one of the ones that Aimsey destroyed.

More red wisps fly out of their hands but they don't focus on anything, just screaming as they're dragged back towards the car.

Niki manages to get a few more steps forwards, she tries to summon her powers but she can't calm down enough and—

And Niki watches Aimsey get thrown into the back of a car.

Then that car speeds off.

With it, so does any hope of Niki saving Aimsey.

Any hope of— well anything.

She doesn't control her anger.

This is *bullshit*. And Niki surges forwards, ready to take lives or kill people or hurt in a way that she never thought she could—

Someone grabs her again, dragging her back.

It's Guqqie.

Guqqie with wide eyes, looks impossibly pale, and like they're going to throw up. She shakes her head, "There's nothing you can do," she says quietly, like a confession.

Niki shakes her head, "No, no— no—"

Guqqie grabs her, dragging her backwards through the crowd, and Niki tries to blink away tears and she inevitably fails. They go through the crowds, with multiple people giving them both sad, pitiful eyes.

Niki wants to slap them, she wants to slap them and scream that they can't give her pity, they could've done something, everyone could've done something and now Aimsey is— Niki doesn't even know.

Guqqie drags them into an alley.

They both stare at each other for a moment, grabbing onto each other and looking at each other with wide eyes, as both of them try to catch their breath and figure out what to say, what to do—

“Aimsey—” Niki chokes out. “They— they took.”

“I know,” Guqqie says, also seeming to fight back tears, “I know. You need to go home, Niki, you need to find out where Aimsey is, wherever that might be. Call police stations, call— call whoever, we can— we can get star back.”

Niki shakes her head, “Guqqie, I can’t—”

Guqqie shakes her head, “Go home, Niki.”

It’s a blur.

It’s a blur of mostly tears, staggering, and being ripped away by two people who just don’t get it. They don’t get it—

They didn’t get it.

She manages to get home.

She tries not to think about it, she tries not to think about the unfairness of it all.

She fails.

Of course, she does.

Niki finds herself on the balcony, arms folded over the edge, staring out at L'Manberg. She finds herself here more and more now, she has an amazing bruise on her eye and more aches and pains everywhere.

She manages to stop herself from crying, only barely.

Her eyes are filled with tears, her phone stays on the little table that's between two chairs. No one knows where Aimsey is.

She called every police station.

Every logical place they could be holding Aimsey apart from the one she was so scared of.

The heroes.

They're the only people who might have taken her.

The only people who don't legally have to give an answer if she calls them.

She feels like she's going to throw up.

There's a knock on the window on the other side of the balcony and Niki whirls around, it's Techno, knocking despite the fact this is his apartment. He's holding two takeout boxes in his hands and giving an awkward smile.

It's so Techno.

Niki opens the door, looking at her friend. “Yes?”

“I got tacos,” Techno says, “Well a burrito and a taco— I’m not sure which one you’d rather so I got both. They’re really good though,” he steps through the open glass door and sets them both on the little table on the balcony.

Niki hums, before turning around and looking at the city that surrounds them.

It suffocates.

Niki hunches over slightly, looking down at the ground with both hands propped against the railing of the balcony.

It’s silent for a long moment.

“I lost them,” Niki whispers, she doesn’t dare look at Techno, she can’t handle that right now.

“Aimsey?”

Niki nods, pressing her mouth into a line so she doesn’t start crying, “They just— ripped them out of my arms, and I was helpless, I couldn’t do anything. I just... watched as they dragged him away from me.”

Techno just stares at her.

He seems to be at a loss for words.

Niki has enough words for both of them.

“I’m always helpless!” Niki yells, “So many times in my life I’ve watched people be dragged away from me— or I’m dragged from them and I thought now that I’m a vigilante, now I’m powerful again, they couldn’t— they couldn’t take people from me anymore!”

Techno doesn’t say a word.

There’s nothing he can say that’ll make this better.

“And— I can’t find them,” Niki whispers, “I checked every police station and— and I think ___”

“I can check,” Techno says.

Niki looks up at him, “Did you know? Did you know that they’d recruit powered people, did you know, Techno?”

Techno shakes his head, “I— I thought that they’d do this the way they always have— the recruitments I thought they’d do it like that, they always do it like that.”

“It’s targeted,” Niki snaps, hitting her hands against the rails and she doesn’t care that it stings. “It’s all fucking targetted, they’re trying to scare the protestors, the ones with superpowers, and they’re—”

Techno just watches her, “Niki—”

“Aren’t you sick of it?” Niki snaps, she turns around fully, so she’s looking at Techno. “How much can the committee take from people— how much have they taken from you?”

Another moment of silence.

Techno crosses his arms, “You know better than anything.”

“Then you know this entire thing is bullshit!” Niki yells, “This is all bullshit, and it’s not fair! You’re all fucking teenagers when they decide that you’re gonna be heroes, and— Aimsey’s only eighteen, it’s not fair!”

“I’ll look out for them,” Techno says, shoving his hands in his pockets, “Niki, it’s going to be fine.”

Niki shakes her head, “It’s not fine, you know it’s not fine!”

“I know,” Techno says, “Trust me, I know.”

“Then how can you say it’s fine!” Niki yells again, “You know it’s not and you know better than anyone what they can do to people—”

“I’ve only met Aimsey a few times,” Techno keeps his face blank, “But I know he’s smart and star knows what he’s doing. They will be fine.”

Niki shakes her head, “It’s not fair.”

“I know, Niki.”

“He was in school, he had someone who I think he liked and he was going to ask them out, and she’d only done a few assignments but she aced them and the professors and lecturers loved her and—”

“I know,” Techno says, “Trust me, you’re talking to one of the only people in the world who knows. I know it’s not fair Niki, it never has been— most people are even younger when they

get dragged into this bullshit.”

“That’s not—”

“Fair?” Techno adds, “Wilbur was ten and he was told he was going to be a hero because he had unique powers and was a ward of the state. That’s still not a choice, and that’s still not fair.”

“I— I guess I never thought about it like that.”

“I don’t think you’ve ever had to,” Techno responds easily, he nudges Niki, giving her a small smile. “Look, if anyone’s gonna take down the hero tower from the inside, it would be Aimsey... or maybe George, he keeps getting long shifts and he is *not* happy about it. Aimsey has this.”

“They’re—”

“Just a kid?” Techno says, and Niki nods, “Well... they’ll have to grow up very quickly, and I know it’s not fair and I know Aimsey deserves to be a kid for longer and I know that xe does not deserve this— but you can’t protect her forever.”

“I can try.”

“Aimsey can look out for themselves, they have a support system, you and me and so many other people both of us probably don’t know about. They will be okay, I promise you that, nothing will happen to them.”

Niki sighs.

“I hate L’Manberg.”

“Join the line,” Techno mutters.

“I miss when things were simple,” Niki whispers, mostly a secret to the night air around them, partly something for Techno here, and a confession to herself. She does. She misses when it was easy.

Techno hesitates, “Was it ever?”

And Niki can’t find him an answer to that.

Not even the empty air seems to answer them

Chapter End Notes

I would like to thank [Rozy!!!](#) for beta-reading this chapter (even if she did try to make me add semi-colons /lh) and now i am telling you all to go read the fic [Burning City](#), [Blank Face](#) they have longer chapters, with GOLDENBOYS (who doesn't love goldenboys) and lots of funny dialogue, and you all should check it out or else :D



Chapter Summary

- We pick off after Tommy dipped in chapter 36, where Niki proceeds to beat up three heroes, gets a power cuff slapped on her wrist, meet a random teenager who helps her out because she might be high, finds Techno on his first patrol in however many months and passes out (girlboss)
- Wakes up and lives her life, argues with AIMSEY (LIGHTS UP ON TINA! AIMSEY MY BELOVED). Aimsey is like “LET ME BE POLITICAL ACTIVE ISTFG” and Niki is like “u r a child.
- Aimsey wins tho, and they decide that Aimsey can protest and yell and shout and Niki is a tiny bit proud of her lil’ sibling figure
- Niki gets the power cuff off, then tries it a couple times, because she’s a queen
- Niki and Aimsey go furniture shopping.
- Purpled and Aurelian go to a protest and stop unjust arrests for happening, and Aimsey takes out like 30 people with her powers, she is fr the most powerful of the Logstedchire Four, her disarm count for this chapter is like 35 people
- Niki reveals to Techno that she knows Tommy is Theseus, and they have a chat about him and that conclusion is: that child is concerningggggg
- POV SWITCH, GEORGE IS NOT HAVING A GOOD TIME AND BEING BLACKMAILED BY SAM???
- There’s fluff, then they’re at the protest, and Aimsey uses his powers to save people, but they get dragged away to who knows where and Niki calls the police station so LOOKS LIKE AIMSEY MIGHT BE BECOMING A HERO!?!?!?! (against their will.)

I KNOW TINAAOS IS SET IN THE SUMMER OF 2021, YES I KNOW ‘VIGILANTE SHIT’ DIDN’T COME OUT UNTIL OCTOBER 2022, SHUT THE FUCK UP IT’S A WORLD WITH SUPERHEROES AND TAYLOR SWIFT IS WHERE YOU DRAW THE LINE??

Anywayyyys,

Hi guys. Sorry for the wait on the update, I have been really busy, I will be 100% honest with you, which is why this took a while to come out, along with the fact I have completely had to rework a couple of plot points and re-did this chapter completely.

Hope y’all enjoyed! Aimsey is fine, please do not worry too much, they will be as fine as someone can be while being forced to be a hero. Niki is also doing alright... Tommy is... well he’s there. We’ll check up on him soon

In Which Tommy Has a Mental Breakdown *CUE KAZOO NOISES*

Chapter Summary

Nothing.

There's no familiar buzz or anything that ticks him off to the fact he even has powers.

Does... he even have powers?

or, a lot of things happen including (but not limited to):

- breakdowns
- kung fu panda edits
- niki nihachu
- wilbur's new fun TRAUMA!
- aimsey and tommy meet (if only for a few moments)
- CLINGYDUO REUNION???

Chapter Notes

Warnings:

arguing, yelling, non-consensual drug use, descriptions of pain, depictions of depression and a depressive episode. Mentions of: vomiting and disassociation

Tommy gets panicky several times throughout this chapter, but he only has one panic attack which starts from here:

Tommy runs his hand through his hair, unable to sort out all of his thoughts. It's too much at once, his thoughts are too loud— he didn't even know thoughts could get loud and—

and ends here (but he keeps spiralling after this):

This has already been established, but Tommy's brain apparently wants to put a special fucking highlight on how badly it's going.

As always, be careful, skip sections you're not comfortable with, there is a summary at the end.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Y'know, Aimsey didn't really fancy being thrown into the back of a car. That wasn't something she really fancied, nor did she want it to happen. Standing up and breaking through the door was impossible.

So was using all their power to try and throw the doors open, Aimsey knocked on the door, trying to kick it down, or use their powers or— doing anything apart from this, anything apart from this sitting there still, not sitting there quietly and accepting this happening to them. He will not sit down and accept this easily.

The van swerves to the side, and Aimsey slams into the wall on one side, grabbing onto the seat against the edge of the wall, at the back. Aimsey kicks their leg against the wall and gets nothing.

Is this netherite or something?

Aimsey makes a noise, leaning back on the seat and putting her head against the wall. This is fucking terrible. Aimsey stands up slowly, the van shuddering underneath them and leans against the wall.

This is fine.

This is fine.

They're probably taking xem to a police station, then Aimsey can take a phone call, call Niki or maybe Techno if things have gone wrong for Niki as well, and maybe parents if things are going real interestingly.

The van stops, and the entire thing shudders and Aimsey get onto their feet.

The door swings open and Aimsey squints at the light that floods into the van, it's not natural light, and Aimsey's mind says that she's underground, and needs to figure out how to deal with that.

"Hello," someone says, and Aimsey holds an arm up to their eyes, trying not to flinch from the sudden light too much, whoever is on the other side of that door is not someone that Aimsey wants to be flinching in front of. "You might be wondering where you are."

"I'd fucking say," Aimsey mutters, eyes becoming more adjusted to the light, and they squint at the other person at the end. "Where the fuck am I?"

"You are underneath the hero's tower."

Aimsey opens stars eyes, squinting at the man in front of them.

In front of them is... well an old white man, for lack of a better phrasing. He looks like he's in his late sixties if he's lucky, early seventies if he's not. He wears a button-up shirt, with a tie that is a bit too loose.

Aimsey can wear a tie better than that.

He wears the typical businessy dress pants, the gross-looking shoes, and he looks at Aimsey, tilting his head slightly.

Aimsey glares, taking steps forwards and is met by the click of two guns.

Right.

Um...

Okay, that's not supposed to be happening.

"What do you want?" Aimsey asks, tone low and almost dangerous. "I have the right to—"

"How rude of myself," he says, "I have not introduced myself yet, I'm William Nelson-Jones, current head of the heroes committee, although hopefully, that will change," he laughs and it is laced with fake charm.

Aimsey nods, taking more steps towards the edge of the van, he ignores the clicks of the guns because he knows that they won't do shit to him. They can try, but they need him here for a reason.

She steps off the back of the van, ignoring the guns.

"Yes?" Aimsey replies, tone curt and clipped. "I'm Aimsey, Aimsey Teese, I use all pronouns, now I'm just gonna ask, why the *fuck* am I here, and I want my phone call?"

"Aimsey," William says calmly, "You have an extraordinary power."

"I am aware."

"I have seen that video of you, throwing that car— the strength you clearly displayed is incredible, I believe that with the right training you could be one of the most powerful heroes."

Aimsey is not dumb.

Despite what Niki says sometimes affectionately, Guqqie mutters it with fondness when Aimsey inevitably has assignments that aren't photography to do, and Aimsey forgets how words work.

They are not dumb.

Aimsey takes a deep breath, "I don't wanna become a hero."

William pauses for a moment, and his face drops slightly. "Ah... I hoped you wouldn't say that Aimsey, I really hoped that I would not have to go this route."

Oh, oh, dear. That's the... nice wording of it.

Aimsey blinks at William, suddenly feeling unwell again. They take a deep breath and don't allow themselves to be stared down.

"My mum's a lawyer," Aimsey says, "I know my rights, and you can't hold me here."

William smiles, a politician's smile, tight and forced and nothing in the eyes behind it, nothing apart from malice. "Oh," he says, "And who are you going to take this up with, the courts? The government? You mean the government who funds the heroes and everything they do?"

"I'll go to the press," Aimsey returns, keeping their voice even.

William sighs, "Aimsey— you're making this so much harder than it needs to be."

"I am not becoming a hero."

“Now,” William smiles, “You can go to the press, but none of the stories will be published, and if they are, the organisations will be sued for so much money they won’t even know what hit them. They will not publish it.”

Aimsey scowls, deep down he knows that. But hearing it... it’s just different. They take a deep breath, standing up a bit straighter and glaring at William, William fucking Nelson-Jones. The man behind— whatever is about to happen.

“Of course,” William continues, tone smooth. “You could recommend your friend... what’s her name, blonde hair— nose piercing, owner of the bakery you work at.” William snaps his fingers, trying to think of... Niki.

They know Niki.

Why do they know Niki?

The panic in Aimsey’s chest rises, just a little bit.

“She also has powers right? They’re on record— weak emotional control that she’s never trained with, but with the potential to be powerful.”

And Aimsey... well she’s not perfect, they almost offer up Niki. Because Niki would rather that and Aimsey *knows* that deep down, that’s what Niki would want out of this situation but...

Aimsey is in a unique position here.

Very unique.

And... it would be a waste of energy to throw that away that easily.

“Okay.” Aimsey says, “Sure. Fine. I’ll be a hero, just— leave the other people in my life out of this.”

“Excellent!” William says, clapping his hands together and Aimsey has never wanted to slap someone as badly as he currently does. “I will show you the way up to your new room and we can figure out your training program.”

Aimsey watches as William walks ahead of them.

Their expression hardens.

Surely the hero committee should know better than to try this.

A known protestor who is clearly against the existence of the hero committee.

And part of a plan starts to form in her head.

And Aimsey?

Aimsey finds himself smiling. Not a sly smirk, not something able to be hidden behind a hand, but a full bubbly feeling in their gut as a bright smile takes up her face.

The hero committee tends not to admit their mistakes or when they regret something... Aimsey hopes to be their first public regret.

Apparently, you have one breakdown and scream at a superhero to arrest you.

The aforementioned superhero refuses.

Scream a bit more and cry *a lot* more and display some... well probably extremely worrying behaviour, all things considered.

And suddenly, you're on leave from work for two and a half weeks.

One breakdown.

That is about how Tommy's life is going at this current moment.

Yeah... that was the big deal, Tommy cried a lot and probably almost made Techno call a therapist on the spot because he has no clue what he said but he knows it's probably not great...

Yeah, that was the end of that.

Tommy got put on break for two and a half weeks.

Not arrested though, and he supposes that's a pretty good thing for him.

He still has a stupid fucking power suppressor on his wrist, that none of them knows how to get off, and that is not for lack of trying. Purpled has done just about everything in his power, Techno— well—

Tommy hasn't seen Techno in a week and a half.

This is his own choice, he's not answering Techno's calls... texts, or— anything really. He's kinda... isolated himself from the world, he's not going to work so there's no one he has to talk to there. Purpled— well Purpled is here for sure, and Tommy isn't exactly the most sociable person at the moment, so not a lot of words are spoken between them.

At this point, Tommy knows the power suppressor isn't doing anything but making sure whatever is lingering around in his system is still there.

Stupid fucking power suppressor.

Tommy grabs at the cuff, it's barely a cuff and more of a bracelet, except it's clasped so there's no gap between it and his skin. After much poking and prodding by Purpled, they've concluded that it's fucking netherite.

So... Tommy isn't going back to work until they get this thing off of him.

Problem.

Tommy doesn't want to get out of bed, let alone search for solutions, let alone have to face going back to work again. Everything he does is awful.

No matter what, it feels like a weight on his bones, everything is too hard, getting out of bed is too hard, and speaking to other people is too hard because he can't explain it.

Purpled gives him odd looks when he thinks that Tommy isn't looking, and Tommy knows that he can't even begin to explain this... whatever it is that weighs down on him. Everything feels heavy and...

Tommy just wants to sleep.

So he does a lot of sleeping, which is rare for him. What isn't rare is the nightmares that follow him even when he's sleeping. Those follow him like a sick promise as he tries to get sleep, or rest.

His mind wanders a lot and Tommy doesn't know what he can do about it anymore.

He just sits in his grief.

But he doesn't know what he's grieving anymore.

Deo? His childhood? Something in the middle of all of this, he's lost track of everything he's lost and the little that he's gained. He stares back up at the ceiling.

Tommy is a lot of things.

Giving up appears to be one of them.

He exists within this fog that he can't describe to anyone else. This fuzziness and sickness that he wades through most days, his head is there, but everything feels blurry as Tommy tries to wade through the days.

The days aren't.... Nice to him.

Thoughts seem to creep up on him all the time, times that he used to think were safe from his overthinking and late night thoughts start to become... middle of the day thoughts, and then that becomes morning thoughts and...

Tommy is left surrounded by a world that feels like too much, and isn't that the problem? Everything always feels like too much now and he just wants— it all to stop.

Tommy ruins everything he touches.

It's just a fact of life.

Tommy hurts everyone around him and he doesn't know how to stop that— he doesn't want to hurt people anymore, he's sick of hurting people.

Why is he hurting people? He doesn't— doesn't mean to, why is it his first reaction? Why does he—

He's sick of hurting people.

The day slips away from him, with Tommy mostly stuck in his own head.

With Tommy going over every relationship he's had with most people, and maybe he is the problem—

Tommy stares up at the ceiling, trying to will away the pit in his stomach that seems to follow him as he cries. It's not a loud sob, it's just... silent, with tears slipping from his eyes as Tommy sits in— whatever grief this is.

He wishes he never took the fucking job at the tower.

For every good thing there, there are a hundred bad things and he's so sick of it. And he can't think anymore because he keeps ruining everything he touches and he's so tired of hurting others and being in pain and—

He's tired.

That's the truth.

For better or for worse or something in between.

The exhaustion is seeping through his bones and he can't—

Purpled comes home.

He immediately drops his bag by Tommy's door and opens his door, it's a slow thing and he pops his head in.

"Oh," Purpled says, which sums up all the emotions Tommy's having. "Okay."

Tommy rolls over so he's laying on his back.

Then he glances at Purpled, who quickly averts eye contact.

"Tommy?"

Tommy doesn't answer, instead, he stares up at the ceiling, focusing on the bug that makes its way across. And for a moment, Tommy wishes he could be a bug.

Prime, that would be so much easier.

Eventually, Tommy finds his voice, and he looks up at Purpled. "Do I ruin everything?"

Purpled blinks at him, "Sorry, what?"

"Like. Friendships— relationships— do I ruin them all?"

"Haven't ruined us," Purpled replies, scooting back on the bed so his back was leaning against the wall. "See— yeah, you hurt people— but like... isn't that what being human is? Saying things without meaning them, regretting it, and being a bit destructive."

Tommy just nods. "I'm sick of hurting people."

"Okay?" Purpled says slowly, "I'd assume you're not like— excited to— apart from that one time, but that was probably a childhood trauma thing—"

"You don't get it," Tommy sits up, "You're not getting it— and I can't explain it but I'm sick of all of this Purpled—" he gestures around him. "You're the only person who's staying—"

"Techno?" Purpled says, "I mean— you're kinda the one avoiding him."

"I keep hurting him!" Tommy yells, and Purpled doesn't flinch. "And— making him choose between me or Wilbur, Theseus or the rest of his life. And that isn't fair along with the warehouse and I'm the fucking reason he's a piglin hybrid now—"

"Did you stab him?" Purpled asks.

"Huh?"

"With blue," Purpled says, "Did you hold him down and stab him in the neck with blue?"

"No."

"Then that wasn't your fault," Purpled replies easily.

Tommy just doesn't say anything, staring at the roof, "Feels like it."

"You have a fucking heroes complex," Purpled deadpans, "Of course, it feels like that."

Tommy just sighs.

"We can make our own decisions," Purpled shuffles off the bed, "Alright— Techno and I are both capable of making whatever shitty choices we want to, and bad news for you— you're not gonna push us away. Jokes on you, we care about you, you fucking idiot."

Tommy nods, "Can you— leave? I think I just need to be upset about this for a bit."

Purpled hesitates, before standing up slowly and walking towards the door.

He opens it and pauses for another few seconds. "If you need anything I'll be rewatching the footage of you bodyslamming Phil."

"Why?"

"It's therapeutic," Purpled closes the door behind him.

Tommy smiles to himself, covering his eyes with his arm.

Purpled is a fucking idiot—

And also his best friend.

Tommy sighs, still watching the bug inch its way across the ceiling. It's not an overly exciting bug... it just does some bug things, whatever those bug things might be, Tommy doesn't know.

And now he misses Tubbo—

Fucking great! That snuck up on him like nothing else.

He sits, staring at the ceiling.

Does he ruin everything he involves himself with— Logstedchire isn't going amazing, and he involved himself with that pretty heavily. Involving himself with the tower— ha, hilarious. Now Sam, Dream and Techno know his identity and two of them might release his identity.

Tommy runs a hand through his hair, looking at the netherite still on his wrist. He sits up, trying to get his fingertips underneath it, and rip it off.

Instead... nothing.

Right. Okay, that is exactly the energy he needs.

Tubbo would probably know how to get it off—

He really needs to stop thinking about Tubbo, this is like when Deo left all over again. The emptiness and inability to think of anything else apart from—

Tubbo was a dick—

Tommy covers his face with both of his hands as if that would block out the thoughts that are bothering him. Instead, the repetition stays in his mind.

Ruins everything he touches.

What's he supposed to do with that?

Cry?

Yeah, he will probably do that now that he thinks about it.

He just misses it when it was easy when he was still traumatised, but significantly less, and could ignore it easier. He misses when he didn't have a vigilante name, he misses the lack of pain that came with thinking about Tubbo and Ranboo. He misses when he was a no-name vigilante who was vaguely grouped with the Logstedchire four, rather than being the face of it.

He misses Deo and he misses Business Bay and he misses his parents because at least then he knew what he was up against—

And— he misses when he had hope that he could tell Wilbur he was Theseus, and when he wasn't so *fucking angry* all the time, which feels like years and years ago.

He misses being happy.

That's the thought that hits him.

He misses... being happy. He misses laughing over the dumbest shit, hugging his friends and laughing with them and he misses all of that more than he can ever put into words.

Fuck.

He's not happy anymore.

The realisation terrifies him.

He was happy before his job at the tower— as happy as he could be with a lack of money. He would laugh with his friends— Ranboo and Tubbo, and yeah it was difficult, and it was tough, and some days he hated it—

But he was happy.

And Tommy wonders if he's forgotten what it's like to really be happy.

It feels like it, most days— he's striving towards the minimum.

Most days where he's striving for... survival? Another day? Where he has no long-lasting plans because he's not sure if he can make any because it feels like his life is always hanging in the balance.

He's so fucking tired.

He's been tired for a while.

He's... so tired.

Tommy runs his hand through his hair, unable to sort out all of his thoughts. It's too much at once, his thoughts are too loud— he didn't even know thoughts could get loud and—

He can't breathe.

Shit, he can't— breathe.

His chest feels like it's closing in on itself and he's unable to breathe right, it hurts— his lungs hurt, it feels like there's something pulling down on them. And *fuck* he can't— he can't breathe.

So he tries to breathe, using some technique that Ranboo—

Shit, fucking Ranboo— Tommy misses him so much—

He's not sure if he misses them, or the people they all used to be.

At this point, the difference doesn't matter.

He chokes out a breath and is fully aware that Purpled has probably heard it. And he can't fucking calm down— he's brought all of this on himself.

And isn't that the problem?

He can't push this on someone else.

This is completely his fault— all of it. He could've quit being Theseus or ran away from Wilbur and Fundy, or he could've learned to control his powers or he could've— he could've stopped this—

Why didn't he stop this— he could've stopped this, why didn't he—

He can't fucking breathe— why is breathing so fucking difficult now. Children do it, dogs do it— and yet here is Tommy, unable to get enough air in his lungs.

He misses Tubbo—

No, he fucking doesn't.

He one hundred percent does.

He can't— do this anymore, and he's not even sure what this is, he's just... so fucking tired of everything that is happening and he's not sure how to deal with it and now Logstedchire is suffering and he didn't ask for any of this and he just wants to be a kid again, but he was never really a kid, to begin with, and—

Next to him, a section of drywall crumbles to the ground.

No— no— nope, that is not— he has a power suppressor on, sure— only on one of his hands. But that's supposed to be controlling it— he's not supposed to be able to hurt himself and other people with a power suppressor on.

He's going to hurt someone— probably himself.

Tommy can barely breathe, he can barely think and everything hurts and—

He— thoughts, thoughts are not doing thoughts things at the moment and his chest hurts and he needs to calm down, and for some reason, he's also crying and he has no fucking clue why he's crying and it doesn't make sense and why the fuck is he crying because— yeah things are going badly but he's crying and why is he—

And nothing makes sense anymore and he can't fucking breathe—

His head is spinning, and Tommy grabs onto the side of the wall to try and steady himself, he's not overly effective and he hits the wall with a thump.

That's gonna get Purpled's attention.

And that's gonna make him even more worried and Purpled has already done enough for Tommy and he doesn't want to bother him because he's kinda all Tommy has left and—

"Tommy?" Purpled yells, "You alright?"

"Yeah!" Tommy squeaks out, "Uh— fell over getting changed," he manages between the free-fall that his stomach is doing and the imaginary choking feeling that is in his throat right now.

It seems to convince Purpled of— something because he goes quiet and Tommy is left to fall apart by himself.

Nothing is going well.

This has already been established, but Tommy's brain apparently wants to put a special fucking highlight on how badly it's going.

He's fucked up Techno's life, probably fucked up Tubbo's and Ranboo's in some way that they haven't told him, fucked up Business Bay. Probably will ruin Wilbur's life in some way

and it's only a matter of time until he ruins Purpled's fucking life—

He does ruin everything he touches.

He destroys it.

Maybe that's his real fucking power, the power to hurt those around him, the power to make them fall apart and Tommy just falls with them.

That might be all he's good for.

His father would be really fucking proud of him, if he wasn't in a grave, he might actually be something other than an asshole if he learnt how much damage Tommy was doing to the people around him.

And now he's breathing slightly easier, it doesn't feel like there's a pit in his stomach anymore. His chest hurts a little but his breathing is better.

He leans against his bedframe, before looking back up at the ceiling, the bug has wandered its way across the ceiling, and is now descending down the wall, apparently.

Tommy just watches idly.

He's not sure when his life has become so much, but it has, and now he's sitting here staring at a bug. His phone buzzes again and he knows it's Techno.

He knows he should talk to Techno.

But the last time they saw each other was— well— okay Tommy had mind-limboed one of Techno's friends, and Techno thought he meant to and was going to arrest Tommy—

But since the whole breakdown situation, he's been avoiding Techno.

Honestly, was a pretty good idea. He should keep that energy up.

His phone buzzes again, and Tommy groans, knocking it off the end table and onto the ground. He doesn't care if it smashes, it doesn't fucking matter.

He manages to wiggle underneath the blankets, before rolling over and ignoring just about every responsibility that he's ever had.

It's warm at least.

But not really, there's a cold pit in his stomach that seems to grow with every breath, it threatens to consume him whole and Tommy hates it. He hates this cold sort of emptiness that's become the new normal.

He hates it.

He wants to rip this... grief, over nothing, this grief over everything and yet nothing and he wants to rip this feeling from his stomach and be over and done with it, he wants to tear it out of himself and take whatever makes him, him with it.

At this point, he doesn't even know what he's supposed to mourn.

It's not mourning, it's a dull sort of emptiness that Tommy just has to lie in and suffer through.

He will get through this.

He has to, surely.

There's never been another option for Tommy, he *has* to get over this and he *has* to be able to bounce back from this, because whatever *this is*, the exhaustion that seeps into his bones and threatens to take everything, whatever this is, it can not be the thing he finally can't bounce back from.

Nothing specific has even happened.

It's just this weird sort of emptiness— this weird sort of acceptance as he stares at the ceiling. There's a pit in his stomach and something inside of him is mourning— or maybe not. Mourning is a big word.

He will get through this.

Whatever this is—

He hopes so.

He stares up at the ceiling, tears don't stream into his eyes this time, instead, a sort of numbness, an emptiness, surrounds him while he just stares at the roof, truly unsure of what to do.

What even has him feeling like *this* specifically?

There's... there's nothing specific.

Just a numbness that seems to seep into his bones.

He's not happy.

He's barely content.

And that thought fucking terrifies him.

“You are so fucking annoying,” Wilbur snaps, turning around and looking at Techno, “The fuck do you even want?”

“To talk, like mature adults.”

“I stopped mentally aging at sixteen,” Wilbur snaps back, putting his hands in his pockets and not even bothering to turn around to face Techno. “It's the trauma.”

“I am aware of your fucking trauma,” Techno says, “You can't just play that card whenever you want.”

Wilbur hums for a moment, turning around and humming a bit longer, in a way that he knows Techno hates. It works because Techno scowls and his entire face drops into a very unimpressed expression.

With a grin, Wilbur leans forwards on the counter.

“You look tired,” Techno notes.

“Could still kick your ass,” Wilbur lies.

He can barely see straight, let alone throw an accurate punch.

Techno raises an eyebrow.

“Look,” Techno sighs, “I don’t want to keep fighting with you over this.”

Wilbur turns around, and he doesn’t hide the way he knows anger shows on his face, he’s always been incredibly emotional, Phil points it out, and Sam faults him for it, but Wilbur has never found a problem with it.

He’s expressive, he’s emotive, he hid behind a pretence of apathy for years and he is fucking done with that.

“So you want me to just— fucking forgive you?” Wilbur asks, “Do you even know what happened? He fucking— messed with my mind Techno!”

Techno watches him.

He tends to just get yelled at in arguments, he doesn’t really tend to argue back, which means Wilbur can go on the rant he has for... weeks.

“I have fucking nightmares about it,” Wilbur hisses, “Alright? I keep having this recurring dream where... where I’m back at the library and Theseus is there... and for some reason, I’m on the ground and he has a fucking pole? A bat— I don’t know.”

Techno just watches him.

“And— I know I’m hurt, I don’t know how, but I’m hurt. Really hurt, and— Theseus swings the bat down at me, and I can hear laughter.”

“Laughter?”

“Yeah,” Wilbur says, ignoring the way his chest has already tightened at the mere mention and thoughts of Theseus. There’s panic in his chest when he envisions the red magic and the sparks and—

Eret.

Wilbur takes a deep breath, curling his hands into fists and looking at Techno. “I think he fucking traumatised me,” he whispers, “And— and I know I joke about that a lot but the colour red makes me feel sick, and— whenever I close my eyes I just see him standing over me.”

Techno’s expression has turned into something... upset.

Wilbur can see it, in the crease of his eyebrows and the frown on his face, Techno isn’t all emotional the way Wilbur is, but they can both read each other well enough. Wilbur has long felt like Techno is his second half.

He knows Techno.

And he knows that Techno is upset.

“I thought he was going to kill me,” Wilbur hates how he means every word, and he hates the way his voice cracks at that. “When... I was on the ground, just before he left— I thought he was going to collapse my lungs in on themselves, or— or something. I—”

Wilbur looks down again, trying to steady himself.

Trying to do... anything.

Techno's still frowning, arms crossed and there's something slightly broken in his expression that Wilbur pretends he can't see.

"Wanna know the worst part?" Wilbur asks, looking down at the floor, it feels like his chest is collapsing in on itself like his ribs are trying to squeeze all the breath out of his lungs. "I don't know if he hits me. In the dream. I wake up before he actually hits me— I don't know if he even hesitates."

Techno frowns, even more, crossing his arms even tighter.

Wilbur's heart is still pounding in his chest, it feels like it's going to burst out of his chest and fall on the floor, he knows he's on the verge of a panic attack, and he knows he might start freaking out.

But he also finds that... he doesn't care.

"So tell me... who the fuck is Theseus, and why did he hurt me?"

Techno stares at him, "Wil, I can't tell you that."

"Why did he hurt me, Tech?" Wilbur yells, slamming his hands on the counter and Techno jumps back a little bit, "I kicked him off a roof— what he did to me is not equal, I can't fucking look at Fundy anymore, the thought of Theseus sends me into a fucking panic attack, I saw him on the news and I freaked the fuck out. This isn't— this isn't even!"

"He's a kid, Wil. He can't control his powers—"

“He seems real fucking in control to me!” Wilbur yells, and he knows he’s crying at this point, but he doesn’t care because nothing is right anymore and Wilbur is so fucking scared of everything and he’s so tired of being scared. “He would have hurt Fundy just to get to me — who fucking *does that* ?”

Techno takes a deep breath, “Wil... it makes more sense, I promise you, I just can’t explain it to you.”

“And while I was hurt, and in hospital and— wanted you there!” Wilbur finally yells, “I just fucking wanted you there Techno. That’s all I ever fucking want, why is this— this care conditional now?”

“Wil—”

“No, shut the fuck up, I’m not done.”

Techno shuts up, closing his mouth and looking at Wilbur

“Look—” Wilbur whispers, “I trust you, I trust you with everything I have and then some. More than Phil, more than anyone and— you must see that Theseus isn’t dangerous but— I keep getting hurt because of him. This probably won’t be the last time, it’s— it’s never the last time. And— and I don’t— I don’t get why this keeps happening. I just don’t get it, I don’t get any of this and—”

“What if Fundy was Theseus?” Techno asks.

“Huh.”

“If someone you really, really cared about was Theseus,” Techno continues, and Wilbur squints at him. What’s his point here. “Someone who you would— die for, what if I was Theseus?”

“Then you hurt me,” Wilbur whispers, looking up at Techno, “Then you— you hurt me? In what world would I fucking forgive you for that?”

Techno’s jaw tightens.

“Then in this hypothetical universe,” Wilbur snaps and his hands are shaking, and he doesn’t think it’s from the lack of sleep. “You fucking hurt me— and you hurt me... I have nightmares because of ‘you’, I can’t look at Fundy because of ‘you’. In what fucking world would I forgive you?”

“I don’t know,” Techno says.

“You’re hiding something from me.”

“I’m hiding a lot of things from you,” Techno returns, and his voice is too calm, Wilbur knows Techno and he knows that he’s lying and deflecting.

Wilbur wants to grab Techno by the shoulders and shake him back and forth, just start screaming for Techno to trust him for once, to let him know what’s happening, to know why Wilbur’s newfound trauma is being justified in Techno’s head.

He wants to grab Techno and start yelling, he wants to grab Techno and start screaming that none of this is fair because why does Techno get to know why Wilbur’s hurt is justified and Wilbur doesn’t?

“You back someone into a corner and they’ll—”

“He was working with a fucking terrorist organisation!” Wilbur yells, “He went out of the building with the intent to cause fucking issues. Have you seen the footage or will that shatter the pedestal that you put Theseus up on?”

Techno grimaces and Wilbur can't help but revel in the feeling of it. "It's more complicated than that, yes, I've seen the footage Wilbur, of fucking course I've seen the footage," Techno takes a deep breath.

Wilbur just watches him, arms crossed and trying not to burst out into tears.

He's so tired and tired of arguing with Techno but... he's not sure if he can bend on this stance, he feels like the take *'hey maybe don't get along with the person who almost fucking killed your brother'* is a super controversial one.

Yet Techno's acting like Wilbur asked him to fucking pull out his own teeth or something.

Techno sighs, "What do you want out of this Wilbur?"

"Huh?"

"I'll arrest Theseus," Techno says, before looking up at Wilbur, "If you want."

Wilbur stares at him, mouth open, "It's not that easy."

"I know his identity, I know where he lives— I could go over and arrest him right now if you wanted. I get why you're mad and— I think you have a point."

Wilbur just stares at him.

"The fuck?" Wilbur says, "No you fucking wouldn't."

“We both know I don’t lie about things like this,” Techno says, his voice is low and almost deadly, if it was directed at someone else Wilbur would be scared for them, but it’s directed at Wilbur and he’s never been scared of Techno.

He’s right.

Techno doesn’t tend to lie, he tends to just... omit.

If you ask him a direct question he tends to give you a direct answer.

Wilbur frowns.

Then he thinks about it.

He... lets himself think about it, and for a long moment he lets himself think about it. He knows Theseus is a kid, and he knows that he’s young, and that Techno cares about him. He knows that Logstedchire cares about that kid.

He knows Theseus will be forced to become a hero.

Wilbur looks at Techno for a moment, someone who was actually forced to become a hero, and he’s seen the mess of that, the nights training and darting around the higher up’s noses and Phil having to risk everything so Techno wasn’t sent to Pandora’s and...

Huh.

“I hate being the bigger person.”

“You don’t have to be.”

“I’m not going to be the reason Theseus becomes a hero,” Wilbur says, and his voice shakes slightly as he says it, “Alright? That’s— I won’t let that be me.”

Techno watches him for a moment. “Wil, are you alright?”

Wilbur watches him for a long moment, putting his hands on the counter and trying to fight away tears. He’s so tired of crying over stupid shit, and if Techno asking if he’s alright is the thing that makes him breakdown—

He’s going to be so mad.

“What about this entire conversation makes it sound like I’m alright?” Wilbur tries to laugh but it comes off more like a choked sob.

Techno just watches him, “If— if it means anything, it might not. Theseus doesn’t have control over the mind powers. They… happen when he’s emotional or scared, and I know that doesn’t— explain away the other stuff.”

“Yeah,” Wilbur’s incredibly choked up.

“Do you need a hug?” Techno asks.

Wilbur looks up at him, and he knows that there are tears running down his face as he does it. Then he nods.

Wordlessly Techno steps towards him and hugs Wilbur tightly.

“I’m sorry,” Techno whispers.

“I know,” Wilbur replies, barely able to speak from the tears running down his face.

Techno just hugs him tighter.

“Why are you watching... sad Kung Fu Panda edits?” Purpled asks.

Tommy looks up at him, eyes teary, “He just wants to be good enough—”

Purpled just looks at him, “Now— Tommy—”

“He’s the best dragon warrior.”

“Are you gonna be... okay?” Purpled says slowly, “If I leave you here alone?”

Tommy nods.

Purpled seems unsure for a moment, “Okay, I have work— I’ll try to knock off early.”

Tommy doesn’t respond, eyes glued to his phone as Po takes every single L imaginable.

Purpled laughs to himself slightly before leaving, there’s not much fanfare and Tommy doesn’t say anything. The only noise is the door shutting with a click and Tommy sighs.

He’s going to watch sad Kung Fu Panda edits all day.

So that's what he does.

Settling down on the couch in a way that must destroy his posture and probably make his spine become dust he idly watches all of the sad videos that he can. He doesn't cry though, that would be too easy, instead he numbly watches the screen.

It's relaxing.

And numbing.

He consumes so much media that he doesn't need to have critical thoughts. All the thoughts out of his head are blocked by the fact that he has music, his phone and something on the TV.

His lack of thoughts is rudely interrupted by a knock on the door.

Tommy looks up from his phone and the sad Kung Fu Panda edits, he prays that it's not Techno as he approaches the door.

With a deep breath, Tommy opens the door.

It's Niki.

"Oh," Tommy says.

Niki smiles at him, a little bit awkward but she smiles anyway, she's holding a shopping bag on her arm Tommy steps to the side and Niki steps into the apartment.

The apartment is a mess.

Tommy's supposed to clean today, but he just— couldn't find the energy he needed to get up and do it. Purpled said he could, and Tommy was going to take him up on that offer if he couldn't summon the energy by today.

There were a significant amount of dishes, the rubbish probably needed to be emptied, but they kept pushing everything down and compacting it a bit more.

“Sorry about the mess—”

“It's fine,” Niki sounds like she means it, she stacks some dishes and manages to find room on their tiny dining table to put her shopping back down.

Then Niki turns around and looks at Tommy, something upset on her face. “Tommy,” she sighs, “Techno's—”

“Worried?” Tommy mutters, looking away.

For the first time in the entire time he's been home, Tommy suddenly has the energy to stack and rinse all of the dishes, which he does, picking up the stack on the dining table and going back towards the sink.

He rinses the few dishes in silence.

“You should respond to him.”

Tommy grits his teeth, focusing on the dishes again.

“He just wants you to be okay,” Niki continues.

“Look,” Tommy says, keeping his voice surprisingly even, “If you’re just here because Techno sent you, you can save it— I don’t *need that* alright? I’m so good. I know he’s worried, and I know all of what you’re saying I just—”

Niki nods, “Okay, you don’t need to explain yourself to me.”

Tommy nods, looking down and putting the dishes on the side of the sink. “So why are you here—” he turns around.

Niki smiles, “I was planning on trying to bake with you, unless you want me to go, which is fine.”

Tommy sighs. “Baking would be nice,” he says politely. “Just know I think measurements are a vague suggestion.”

Niki breaks out into her own smile, “And that is why we are making sausage rolls, rather than something that requires exact measurements.”

She reaches over the table to grab the shopping bag on the table.

Her sleeve lifts up a bit.

Tommy stops and stares at the mark on Niki’s wrist. He recognises it because he’s sure it’s what’s underneath the cuff that is currently on his wrist. The mottled cut that Tommy has one matching from trying to pry the cuff off.

He stares at Niki’s wrist.

Niki seems to catch what he's doing, before glancing down at Tommy's own.

Tommy pulls his hoodie sleeve up.

Her face contorts in horror and she stares at Tommy with wide eyes.

"Tommy— that's been on for two weeks—" Niki says weakly, she looks at Tommy with something sad in her eyes.

"Get it off," Tommy whines, "Please I— get it off, I don't—" he waves his wrist around like that does anything, and he's aware that he's acting like a child, but he just wants this fucking thing off his wrist.

It's making his head cloudy and fuzzy and he hates that more than anything.

"Okay, I can do that," Niki says gently, reaching behind the back of her head... for some reason, "I'm going to need to grab your arm," she looks up at him, "Is that alright?"

Tommy nods, "Just— fuckin' get it off— please get it off— I can't fucking think with— get it off, get it off."

Niki seems to hear something in his voice because she moves the pair of them to the dining table.

Niki grabs his arm, with much more gentleness than he deserves, and she pulls a bobby pin out from... somewhere in her hair, before putting that on the table and holding Tommy's arms with two hands, seemingly trying to adjust it right.

She looks up at Tommy again, "This is going to feel odd," she says gently, "You know how this works right?"

“Kinda— I think— I dunno—”

She nods, “Basically, there’s a drug in there— that was probably reverse-engineered from blue, that will repress your powers, targeting the parts of genes and cells that make your powers... well power,” she glances up at him again, “Essentially you have been drugged for two weeks and— taking it out is going to sting a little.”

“It’s too fuzzy,” Tommy mutters, “Head’s too fuzzy— don’t— don’t feel like I’m in control.”

“Okay,” Niki nods, before readjusting Tommy’s arm, “I’m sorry that no one came to help you with this earlier, two weeks is a very long time.”

“It’s fine,” Tommy mumbles, “Please just get it off.”

Niki nods, and turns her focus to Tommy, she moves his arm again before picking up the bobby pin with her other hand. She sticks her tongue out, as she manages to get the bobby pin between what must be a tiny gap between Tommy’s wrist and the cuff.

“It’s like these were made for you,” Niki mutters.

Her face furrows in concentration.

Tommy jerks his wrist back, shaking his head.

“I don’t— I don’t like it, it—”

“Okay, okay,” Niki says, putting the bobby pin down, “That’s alright, we have time. Just take your time Tommy, we have time— so much of it.”

“I want it off— but my head is all fuzzy and— I can’t calm down.”

That seems to make a little lightbulb appear in Niki’s brain because she looks Tommy in the eyes, something serious there, “Okay— I can calm you down, but it is going to feel weird, especially for someone who is constantly at heightened stress, and it might make you freak out more. My powers don’t work well on people with anxiety and teenagers and you happen to be both of those.”

““M fine.”

Niki raises an eyebrow, and that says everything Tommy needs to know and then some.

“Really—”

“So,” Niki says, “I can calm you down with my powers, at least attempt to, but it might make you feel all fuzzy and weird which might make you freak out even more. Or I can wait it out with you, I don’t mind either.”

Tommy takes a deep breath, “Just do it. Don’t let me pull away.”

“I am not comfortable with that at all,” Niki replies, “I’m not going to hold your arm down or anything.”

“Niki,” Tommy groans, “Come on man— just hold down my arm.”

“I’m not holding you down, Tommy,” Niki snaps, something a bit fiercer in her voice, something that makes Tommy sit up straighter and his eyes become a little bit wider. “Alright? I’ll— put the smallest amount of pressure, but if you even move your arm, I’m moving it.”

“Alright.” Tommy grits his teeth.

Niki takes another deep breath, moving Tommy’s arm. This time she grabs the cuff with one hand, not holding Tommy’s arm down, but a reminder that he needs to try and stay still. With her other hand, she grabs the bobby pin.

The feeling of having metal scrape against raw and bloody skin is not enjoyable at all, he winces slightly as he feels it against his skin. It doesn’t ache as such, it just... feels a bit familiar, that’s all.

And Niki seems to get it.

Because the cuff falls off his hand, and there’s a dot of blood where part of the cuff was. Tommy stares at it, then up at Niki.

His head feels fuzzy.

No, no— he needs to be in control of his actions, not again— not again, he’s dangerous when he isn’t.

Tommy grabs Niki’s arm with wide eyes, he knows his breathing isn’t with a smooth pattern, but it’s working well enough, he’s panicking, not having a panic attack. But his head is fuzzy and his thoughts are drifting and his limbs are weak and—

“Niki—”

“I’m here,” Niki says evenly, “What do you need—”

“Control, I can’t— fuzzy, it’s fuzzy again and I need to be in control of my actions and— and it’s not— Niki I can’t—” He stands out of his chair, head spinning, he can feel the buzz in his veins.

His powers are coming back.

And knowing Tommy, they're coming back with a fucking vengeance.

Another headache splits through Tommy's head, and he finds himself staggering until he hits the wall with a thump.

Niki is on her feet in about two seconds, standing with concerned eyes, and hands out in front of her like she's not quite sure what to do, and Tommy doesn't know either. Everything hurts, it hurts—

His head aches and he brings a hand up to the area. The back of his head, and he pushes against it, hoping that'll make it hurt less.

"Tommy, what's happening?" Niki asks.

"I don't know," Tommy rasps out.

Another wave of pain, and this one is so bad that Tommy's legs collapse on themselves. He's half-caught by Niki.

He presses two hands against either side of his head, pushing like that'll make it stop.

It doesn't.

All he can think about is the pain, it's like in his brain there's a little person who picked up a sledgehammer and decided to smash it against the side of his skull. His eyes go blurry and he can barely— *think*.

It's just all pain.

It all hurts.

It hurts so badly.

"I can't—" Tommy slurs out, his eyes closing closely, "Niki— I can't feel my powers, I'm supposed to feel my powers, I can't—" he leans back against the wall, his eyes still fuzzy.

Everything is wrong.

It's all off.

It's not— it's not right.

His head spins again and his stomach lurches.

It's wrong— it all feels wrong.

Niki crouches so she's in front of him, "Tommy— you need to calm down."

"I can't— I fucking—"

"I can calm you down," Niki says, her voice is still even and there's not a hint of panic in it. "Alright? I can calm you down, but I'm only going to if you say it's okay, you've had too many choices taken from you recently."

Tommy's head is still spinning, everything is off and he just wants it all to stop.

"Yes," Tommy rasps out, "Please."

Niki nods, before reaching up to the side of Tommy's head.

Her hand is warm.

And Tommy just feels...

A wave of calm that washes over him.

It's weird to describe, but it really feels like a wave, with the way his heart calms down straight away and his breathing, evens out. His head still hurts like a bitch, but he supposed nothing can be done about that.

Tommy stares at Niki with wide eyes.

"Woah," he mutters.

Niki laughs, "Yeah, pretty cool power, huh?"

Tommy nods.

It feels so weird like clarity has suddenly hit him, his muscles aren't tensed for once and the calmness... It feels so weird. He's not used to this, he can't remember the last time he stopped tensing his shoulders and clenching his jaw.

Niki sighs, moving so she's sitting against the wall next to Tommy.

They're both quiet for a while, and Tommy leans his head back against the wall, the back of his head still aches, and quite badly, but it doesn't cloud his thoughts though, and he lets this... calmness, whatever it is, wash over him.

It's odd to be calm.

It's been a while since Tommy's actually been calm.

Niki glances at him, "You okay?"

"Fine," Tommy says through gritted teeth, "Everything's fine."

Niki raises an eyebrow, "It's okay if you're not, you don't need to be okay."

Tommy laughs, rolling his eyes, "Okay *Niki*."

"Okay, *Tommy*," she responds in the same tone.

Another moment of silence, and Niki also doesn't seem to know how to fill it. "So..." Niki drawls, "Do you believe in em dashes?"

"Huh?"

Niki smiles, something wistful on her face, "Like, when you're texting someone, do you use a hyphen, or worse *multiple* hyphens, instead of just using an em dash."

“I use a hyphen.”

Niki sighs, shaking her head, “Somehow you chose wrong, Tommy.”

“I’m quite skilled at that!” Tommy says cheerfully, and Niki bumps him in the shoulder. “Really, I am, my track record of making the wrong choice is like... libraries long, I swear. I didn’t know someone *could* make the wrong choice in every single possible situation.”

“You’re not that bad at decisions,” Niki mutters, she sighs, slumping down a little, “Trust me, every teenager makes bad decisions, I still make them. Yesterday I decided to get Italian instead of Japanese.”

Tommy just looks at her, “You are kidding?”

“Nope,” Niki smiles.

Another wave of pain rips through Tommy. He grits his teeth and clutches his head.

What the fuck is happening?

“Bashing my head into the wall might hurt less,” Tommy grits out.

“Pain level,” Niki says, “From one to ten. How bad is it?”

“Six?” Tommy says.

And like that it’s over.

Tommy frowns, “That’s... that’s really weird.”

“You alright?”

“Yeah...” Tommy says slowly, standing up, it hurts... but it’s more like a dull ache in the back of his head, the dull ache replacing the buzzing that’s normally there. Which is... odd. He squints for a moment at nothing in particular.

Odd.

Really odd.

“You alright?”

“Yeah,” Tommy says, “Just— just off, I’m okay though.”

Niki watches him for a few more moments.

“Alright,” she helps him up onto his feet, “Let’s make food.”

“I love food.”

Tommy ignores mentioning that the thought of eating makes him feel nauseous, he’s still eating of course.

Niki grabs a bunch of stuff out of the shopping bag, dropping it on the table.

Making sausage rolls is surprisingly simple, even if the texture of the meat is something that makes him want to throw up. Tommy could probably make these by himself if he committed to it.

Niki first of all cuts up an onion and Tommy cries because of it. Despite standing on the other side of the room.

Niki laughs *a lot* at that and Tommy finds himself smiling a little bit too.

He's missed being able to smile easily.

Then she cuts up a zucchini which is incredibly impressive and Tommy just watches it as she dices it at an incredible speed, she's barely even looking down as she does it, eyes flickering up and down from Tommy.

"Do you have a blender?" Niki asks.

"Uh... no?"

Niki doesn't waste any time, demolishing a zucchini with the skill of someone who has done this a million times. It's in tiny little bits as if it had been blended rather than chopped with a knife.

"Put that in the bowl."

Tommy puts that in the bowl.

Then Niki also attacks a carrot and puts that in the bowl too. Then she puts the sausage meat, which is a sentence Tommy really enjoys saying out loud to piss off Niki, in the bowl as well.

Then Niki just kinda... opens his fridge.

Tommy screws up his face.

“There’s not a lot in here,” Niki says carefully, but she gets some stuff out either way.

“Yeah, I gotta go shopping,” Tommy says.

Niki nods, she has barbeque sauce and tomato sauce because... Tommy doesn’t really know.

“Can you grab the breadcrumbs out of the shopping bag I brought?”

Tommy does that.

Niki looks at him, a deadpan expression on her face, “And maybe open them?”

“Oh— right, sorry?” Tommy grabs the breadcrumbs.

He pulls on either side of the bag.

The bag explodes everywhere.

Tommy gets breadcrumbs all over the counter.

Niki and him stare at each other, “Have you like... ever cooked Tommy?”

“Yes, I have cooked, Niki.”

She seems unsure but just watches him for a few more moments before going on with her day. She puts in the sauces and then the egg.

“Now,” Niki says, “I’m going to mix this with my hands— and you’re going to pour in the breadcrumbs when I ask.”

“Aye, aye, Cap’n.”

The noise it makes when Niki mixes it. Is the worst thing Tommy’s ever heard.

It seems like a textural nightmare—

“Can you put some breadcrumbs in?”

And the pattern of Niki mixing and Tommy pouring in breadcrumbs continues. The noise is still awful, but it comes together in a mostly coherent-looking mess of a thing.

Niki washes her hands, and then explains how to roll them. A line of the meat and then rolling the pastry over, and then kinda... tucking it in, and then cutting the sausage rolls into four.

She then puts them on the tray that she’s somehow had time to line.

Tommy finds himself absorbed in the utterly mindless task, with Niki doing the meat, and then Tommy rolling it and then cutting them.

Because Niki is just faster she also manages to make an entire tray by herself while also helping out Tommy with his.

Niki really is the fucking coolest.

Then out of nowhere, like a fucking truck—

He doesn't want to be Theseus.

He hasn't wanted to be Theseus for a long time.

And he goes to tell Niki that, that he's done with this, he's done with the thing that hurts him and makes him hurt others. The thing that he uses to justify his hurt to others and himself, the reason for...

All of this.

He goes to tell Niki, tell her everything and let the words just spill out of his chest as he talks and talks and talks.

The words get stuck in his throat, and he stares down at the sausage roll that he's supposed to be cutting so it's not just one super long one, but instead four separate sausage rolls.

Niki notices the fact he's completely frozen and she looks up from where she's actually rolling the sausage rolls. She wipes her hands on her jeans again, she really needs an apron of some kind.

"Can I stop?" Tommy asks.

“If you don’t want to cut the sausage rolls that’s fine—”

Tommy shakes his head, he looks down again and cuts the roll into half and then half again, so it’s in quarters.

Niki seems to know not to push this one, and she goes back to doing her own thing as well.

He cuts the sausage rolls with a bit more anger than he probably needs, he looks up at Niki and down again. Thoughts are swimming in his head, and yet he doesn’t know how to word a single one of them.

He’s tired.

He needs a break.

That’s the cruel truth, he supposes.

He needs a fucking break.

From all of it, from Theseus and the tower and—

He just needs a break.

He’s so tired of having to fight now, of being the face of a protest that he doesn’t even want to be, of being the figurehead for something that he doesn’t know how to put into words. He doesn’t want to become a political tool for two sides of a conflict that he doesn’t want to be involved in.

Fighting Wilbur or Fundy or any other heroes. Having people continuously risk their skin for him, day in and day out. And the lying—

He hates the lying, he hates the fact that Wilbur can't ever really know who he is, because he's hidden so much of himself in fear of Wilbur finding out. Or Phil, or anyone else he cares about in the tower—

He hates that he is allowing himself to become a worse person because he's hidden by a mask.

He doesn't want to be that person anymore.

Not the one who fights and kicks and snaps insults at people whenever they don't agree with him. He doesn't like the person he's becoming, the person who he can look at in the mirror and see his father.

Tommy doesn't want to be like his father.

And he doesn't want to become scared of his own reflection, the one with cold eyes, no smile lines, and dull hair that seems to have lost its life.

He doesn't want to become the person in his nightmares.

"I quit," Tommy's voice is barely above a whisper.

Niki doesn't hear him.

Somehow that hurts more.

“I quit,” Tommy says, his voice slightly louder, but still with a wobble that he wishes he could get rid of.

Niki looks up.

“Pardon?”

“Being Theseus,” Tommy whispers.

For some reason his heart is thumping in his chest, his hands are shaking and he feels like he might just explode. His hands are shaking so much that he puts the knife back on the table.

Holy shit.

He said it.

He actually said it.

Niki looks at him, a fond smile on her face, “Oh?” She says.

Tommy nods, “Yeah!” His voice finds strength again, and his hands are still shaking but he feels better about it. “I— I don’t like the person I’m becoming, I don’t want to become that person, I’m better than that. I can be better than that, I want to be better than that.”

Niki smiles.

“I don’t like the person I’m becoming while I’m Theseus,” Tommy says evenly, and he looks up at Niki. “And so— I don’t want to be Theseus anymore.”

“It’s not your job to do anything,” Niki says gently, and she steps forwards, putting a hand on Tommy’s shoulder. “Alright? It was never your job to save Logstedchire from the government, it was never your job to take down the fighting rings.”

Tommy tries to brush Niki away, he doesn’t want to cry, “Niki it’s nothing—”

She shakes her head, “You need to hear this Tommy, at no point was it your job to change the world. And I am... so, *so* sorry that the world was broken enough that you ever thought it was.”

Tommy hates how tears spring to his eyes.

“And despite that, you did amazingly,” Niki continues, looking him straight in the eye, and Tommy can’t look away because he thinks this is what he’s needed this entire time.

He just wanted someone to tell him he did well.

“Alright?” Niki says, “You did enough, okay? You did so much, for so many and— I’m proud of you.”

Tommy wipes his eyes, “Niki, I will cry.”

Niki laughs, before grabbing him by the shoulders and ruffling his hair.

Honestly, Tommy is not overly impressed about this, and he tries to slap Niki’s hand away, but Niki is way better than he is.

She manages to significantly mess up his hair, and Tommy swats at her hand. Which makes Niki laugh even harder. She decides to have mercy on Tommy, and lets go of him, still

laughing a little bit.

“You’re a good kid,” Niki says, “Alright? No matter what you think about yourself, okay? You’re a good person, most people wouldn’t have even become a vigilante at all, most people would just... keep living their lives.”

“I owe Logstedchire something—”

“Nope!” Niki says easily, walking over to the sink and Tommy gets up, rushing over, because he is not going to make Niki tackle the dishes alone, “You owe Logstedchire nothing, you never owed them anything. You’re just a kid, Tommy, please get that through your brain. You don’t owe anyone anything.”

“Anyone?”

“You owe yourself the sort of kindness you give others—”

Tommy laughs at that, “I give no one kindness, Niki, that’s my whole thing. It’s a whole problem I’m trying to like— figure out y’know.”

Niki just looks at him.

She looks a mix of tired and incredibly depressed. “Tommy—”

“I’m not wrong!” Tommy offers with a shaky smile.

Niki sighs and turns on the tap.

There are more dishes than Tommy remembers, Purpled and him don't make a lot of dishes, but over a while— well they make a couple, and now Tommy feels guilty as shit that he's kinda making someone else do his dishes—

He was going to get to them, he just...

Didn't have the energy.

"I got it," Tommy says, reaching for the dishcloth.

Niki snatches the dishcloth away, and then hits Tommy in the shoulder with it, Tommy swats at Niki who easily ducks away from his lazy hit.

Then Niki, like the badass she is, manages to grab Tommy's wrist with one hand and hit him in the face with the... wet dishcloth with the other.

"Oi!"

Niki responds by hitting him in the face with the dishcloth again and Tommy cries out.

"You can help," Niki says easily, "But I made the dishes too, so I can also help."

Tommy goes to protest this, and then Niki hits him in the head with a tea towel.

"Oi!" Tommy snaps.

Niki grins, spinning the towel again so she can hit Tommy with it again. She laughs and Tommy ducks under the next fling of it, and he moves so he's standing behind Niki. Then he grins as he moves out of another swing.

He's such a gamer.

"Truce?" Tommy offers.

Niki responds by hitting him in the shoulder with the tea towel before nodding. "Sure."

"Oi!"

Niki just smiles a bit brighter, it's almost funny.

So they get to do the riveting job of the dishes. Which is incredibly annoying and also boring, even with Niki singing under her breath and dancing slightly. Tommy finds himself dancing as well.

Taylor Swift.

Niki just sings Taylor Swift.

And Niki is now Tommy's new favourite person.

It makes the dishes only slightly more fun, as Niki twirls every now and again before breaking out into song.

It feels like almost no time at all, and then all the dishes are washed, dried and put away, Tommy's back hurts from craning towards the sink because the sink is short and Tommy is quite tall, all things considered.

“*And by morning, gone was any trace of you, I think I am finally clean,*” Niki sings, twirling the towel around her arm. “Something, something, something—I dunno the rest of the words,” she sings in tune.

“Fake Swiftie,” Tommy adds, grabbing the towel and wiping his hands on it. “Next you’re going to tell me you don’t know every lyric to ‘No Body, No Crime’.”

Niki’s mouth falls open, with pure offense. “The *audacity*. Are you mansplaining ‘No Body, No Crime’ to me?”

“So the song is about—”

“Tommy.”

“Uh, murder!”

“I can not believe you are mansplaining Taylor Swift to me.”

“Boysplaining,” Tommy adds thoughtfully, “I am but a child, a young innocent child who has no thoughts. I don’t know a single bad word, I have never heard of a single bad word. What is a— shit.”

Niki laughs, rolling her eyes fondly. “Now put the cut sausage rolls into the oven, don’t burn yourself.”

“I mean like I wasn’t *planning* on it.”

“Can never be sure with you.”

He picks up the sausage rolls before opening the oven with his other hand, putting the tray in without burning himself, which is honestly a pretty big win for him. He looks at Niki, “See, I didn’t burn myself!”

“So proud,” Niki deadpans, handing him the other tray.

Tommy also doesn’t burn himself on that tray.

He is *so* good at sausage rolls.

Niki snorts at him before sighing, wiping her hands on her jeans and leaning back against the counters. Tommy just watches her for a few moments before copying and standing across from her.

She snorts looking at Tommy, raising an eyebrow.

Tommy copies her.

“Have you ever heard of masking?”

“Yeah, when you put on a mask—”

“No...”

Tommy pauses for a few moments before tilting his head at Niki, “Nah. I’ve decided.”

Niki opens and closes her mouth again, before shaking her head, “Y’know what, sure.”

“What’s masking, *Niki*?”

“When you put on a mask,” Niki deadpans.

“Why do you hate me and everything I stand for?”

“I don’t.”

“I am just unsure of that.”

Niki sighs, rolling her eyes and crossing her arms, “It’s when someone copies someone else’s behaviour in order to seem normal.”

“Why are you telling me this?” Tommy asks, “I am a perfectly normal and reasonably adjusted person.”

Niki just raises an eyebrow.

She needs to stop doing that.

Tommy frowns at her and Niki frowns back.

“Bitch,” Tommy mutters, “Why the fuck would someone mask?”

Niki sighs, “Not even going to start having this conversation with you.”

“But Niki—”

“Ask... Phil.”

“Phil?”

“He’s old, he knows things.”

“You’re old and you know things.”

Niki huffs, rolling her eyes, again.

Y’know, Tommy is pretty sure he gives the general aura of someone being incredibly annoying at all times, and everyone else has to deal with that.

Or kill him!

Those seem like reasonable options.

Niki watches him for a moment, before her mouth quirks up into a smile, “So, Tommy, what are you gonna do with all your... non-Theseus time.”

“My non-Theseus time?”

“You’re gonna have a bunch of spare time,” Niki explains, “And hopefully way less stress—unless someone’s trying to murder you. Do you think anyone’s trying to murder you?”

“There’s probably a list,” Tommy mutters.

Niki's smile fades, "You're— you're joking right?"

Tommy gives her a flat look.

"You're not joking?"

"I mean— I don't know any who personally want me dead, but there's at least one."

"Hey... Tommy, what the fuck?"

Tommy waves a hand, he probably doesn't want to bring up that he's been in several near-death situations and he's pretty sure someone would snipe him if they could.

"Uh—" Tommy says, "I dunno, what do you think I should do?"

Niki pauses for a moment, "Something difficult."

"Huh?"

"Something difficult that you don't want to do, but it'll benefit you in the long run."

Tommy pauses for a moment.

He knows what that thing is, it pulls on his stomach and he looks down at his phone again, "Maybe..." he says quietly, "Possibly..."

He opens his contacts on his phone, seeing the all-too-familiar one and closing it again.

A while passes in relatively comfortable silence, with both of them on their phones.

Eventually, a timer goes off.

It's a timer on the oven? Tommy didn't even know they had a timer connected to the oven, and it finally makes sense what that knob was for.

Tommy squints at it.

"Sausage rolls are done," Niki says.

"That was only like fifteen minutes—"

"You would be surprised," Niki responds.

When Niki gets the sausage rolls out of the oven and puts them on a tea towel she already has out, then she starts moving them onto the cooling rack straight away like a complete legend.

"Can you grab the other ones?"

"Yup," Tommy grabs the oven mitt and opens the oven, grabbing the tray before putting it on top of the stove.

He looks down at his handy work, as Tommy did roll up half of this tray and—

The ones he rolled up look different to Niki's.

He stares at them, squinting slightly.

They look wrong.

Tears come to his eyes.

No.

Nope, this is not what he cries over— he doesn't cry over some weird-looking sausage rolls, it's Tommy, he cries over the big stuff, the fact his life is falling apart, not some weird-looking sausage rolls—

Why are there more tears in his eyes?

"Tommy?" Niki asks, "Do you need a hand?"

Tommy stares at them for a long moment.

He will not cry over this—

He refuses to cry over sausage rolls.

"Tommy?"

Aw dammit, now he's crying over some weird-looking sausage rolls.

He looks at Niki, “They’re wrong.”

Niki seems startled by the fact he’s crying, but she doesn’t let it show through too much and takes a few steps towards him.

She stands on her tiptoes and looks over Tommy’s shoulder.

“They look alright to me.”

“They split,” Tommy says quietly, his voice shaking, “Yours didn’t— they’re not supposed to —”

He refuses to sob over sausage rolls.

Then he starts sobbing over sausage rolls.

He covers his face with both of his hands, and takes a few steps back, shaking his head as he hides his face from Niki. Him crying is not a great look, especially for Niki, who barely knows him yet.

And now he’s crying over sausage rolls but it’s not really about sausage rolls anymore, it’s about everything else and this is just the last thing to go wrong in the mess of his life that somehow doesn’t get better and he fucked this up, and he keeps fucking things up and he doesn’t want to keep fucking things up and—

The sausage rolls aren’t right.

“Hey, hey,” Niki says gently, she doesn’t grab him and he is so grateful for that, “It’s alright, it’s okay— it was your first time making them, mine exploded the first time, and I still don’t

know how they did it.”

Tommy doesn't remove his hands from his face, he tilts his head down towards the floor and cries a bit harder.

When he was little he got told life got better, it always got better.

Tommy is still waiting for it to get better.

“It's supposed to get better!” Tommy yells, still crying, with tears streaming down his face, “Why does it never get better— the first person who cared about me left me and— and— I can't fucking— when does it get better Niki?”

Niki looks like her heart is breaking inside of her.

“I'm so tired of hurting, I'm so tired of hurting others, I just want it to get better! I want to get better, and it just doesn't— things never get better and I— I don't know how much more of it getting worse I can take.”

“You're strong—”

“Well, I don't want to be!” Tommy screams.

Part of him feels bad for screaming at Niki, who has been nothing but lovely to him— scratch that, every bone in his body feels bad for screaming at Niki.

Niki doesn't react back in anger, she just looks at him with that heartbroken expression that she's been giving him.

Like she's grieving something.

"I— I don't want to have to be strong!" Tommy yells again, "I'm so tired of being told I'm strong and resilient and I'll get through this because—" he cuts himself off and runs both of his hands down his face.

Tears are still streaming down his face, and he can't control it.

It hurts.

Breathing hurts.

Not in the panic attack way, but in the exhaustion seeping into his bones way.

"For once I don't want to *have* to be strong, I don't want to *have* to carry it all, I don't want to be strong— I just—" Tommy's voice breaks.

Niki takes another step forward.

"I just want to be a kid!" Tommy yells, a confession to both himself and Niki who's still standing in front of him, who hasn't met his anger with more anger, who has a steady expression and something mournful on her face rather than angry. "I'm sixteen, I'm fucking sixteen I can't handle this— I can't handle any of it!"

"And that's okay, you don't need to handle this, you don't need to be strong enough to face it all, but you *are* strong, but you deserve a world where you don't have to be strong."

"Does it get better?" Tommy asks, managing to meet her eyes this time, teary eyes meeting the steady eyes that Niki seems to have, the certain eyes that Tommy needs right now. "Does any of it— will it?"

Niki pauses for a moment, seemingly thinking about it. “You will hurt. You will have downs, and you will cry and be hurt and hurt others— but somewhere within that, is life, and that is what makes it worth it. The laughter and eating dinner with friends and— that’s what makes it worth it.”

Tommy stares at her, “Is it?”

Niki considers it.

Just for a few moments.

“Yes, always,” her voice is unwavering. “It’s worth it.”

Tommy nods, looking down again.

He stares at the floor, with tears still rolling down his face.

He’s not sure what about Niki makes him want to break down and tell her all his secrets, he knows it’s not a power thing, it’s probably... just a thing, if he’s being honest. Niki is trustworthy and Tommy has a lot of secrets to share.

“Can I hug you, Tommy?” Niki asks.

Tommy nods his head.

Niki doesn’t hesitate, before walking towards Tommy and wrapping her arms around him. She’s shorter than him, so she stands up a bit straighter so he can hug him around the shoulders.

Tommy manages to lean down so he's basically crying into Niki's shoulder.

"I can't keep doing this," Tommy says between sobs that wrack his entire body. "I don't—I can't keep doing this, I can't keep living like this—I just want it all to stop, please make it all stop."

Niki grabs onto him tighter, hugging him tight enough that it almost hurts.

"Niki—" Tommy says, and it sounds like a whine in the back of his throat, desperate and clingy but he doesn't care anymore.

Both of them stand there, Niki lets Tommy cry on her shoulder and Tommy has never been as grateful for a person as he is at this moment.

Niki holds him.

If Tommy ever had a sister, maybe this would be what it's like.

When Tommy's tears have evened out, after hiccuping sobs and so, so much snot, he's not a pretty crier, and he won't even lie and say that he is. He is a fucking ugly crier, it's terrible—would not recommend it.

Niki lets go of him, looking at him. "Feel better?"

"Loads," Tommy laughs, wiping at his eyes, "Thank you."

"Always," Niki responds gently, "Alright? I'm not Techno or Daniel, or whoever else is in your corner—"

That's about the list.

“But, I am here for you,” Niki says, “Alright?”

Tommy nods, wiping his eyes a bit more, “Thank you,” he says with a clogged-up voice, “Just for—” he waves his hand non-committedly and he knows Niki understands, “For the baking and the dishes and—”

Niki smiles, “Well, even heroes need help, and kids need to talk through their feelings.”

Tommy looks down at the ground, crossing his arms, “I’m not sure about the Theseus thing—I’ve thought about it and I can do so much good and I don’t want to throw that away—”

“Nope,” Niki says brightly, “Try not being Theseus for a while.”

“I have to go back to work,” Tommy mutters darkly, “I have to face everyone there—”

“I’m having a birthday thing in a few days,” Niki says with a smile, “Techno will be there—and I think he’s holding it at Phil’s because he just has nowhere else to host my friends. Wilbur might be there,” she screws up her nose at this and for no reason, Tommy almost goes to defend him. “But... you’re invited.”

“I am?”

“Yeah,” Niki says, “Since I said so, and it’s my twentieth birthday, and if Techno disagrees with me then he’s wrong for that, and I will win.”

“You’re only nineteen?”

“Only for a couple more days, then I will have been alive for multiple decades.”

“You’re old,” Tommy murmurs.

Niki nods, “You can stop worrying about Theseus for a while, just be Tommy for a bit— talk with your friends, meet some of my friends, mostly coworkers honestly— I’m not a super social person, but... just be yourself for a day.”

“I don’t know who that is anymore.”

Niki tilts her head at him, watching him, clearly thinking for a few moments. “Then you have time to figure it out, who do you want to be Tommy?”

Tommy pauses. “I don’t know...”

“Well,” Niki hums.

“I want to be kinder,” Tommy says, “Y’know?”

Niki nods understandingly. “I get that.”

Tommy sighs, running his hands down his face.

“You should go,” Tommy says.

Niki glances at her phone, “You’re probably right,” she mutters, “Why the fuck has Twi texted me— we’re out of flour okay that would be why.”

“What the fuck is a Twi?”

Niki stops, looking up at him. “One of my workers?”

“Oh. Yeah, that makes sense. Who names their child Twi?”

“Who names themselves Theseus?” Niki returns.

“I didn’t call myself that!” Tommy throws his arms in the air, “It’s a bullshit name! They chose a fucking sexist, awful man of a mythology figure. Why couldn’t I have been... Hades? Everyone loves Hades— or fucking Atlas? At least that’s fun— or even ditch the theme entirely, why do you get Aurelian? That’s such a cool name.”

Niki watches him with amusement.

“Even... Gun Man would have been better.”

“You don’t use a gun?”

“Exactly! I trick them, they go ‘*gun man where is your gun?*’ And then I go, ‘*ha ha, you fool.*’ Then I fucking stab them.”

Niki just stares at him. “I’m gonna go.”

“Yeah, that would probably be wise—”

Tommy pauses for a moment.

He squints.

“Wait, I have a gift for you!”

Then he turns around and fucking runs for his bedroom, he looks around for a bit, throwing things aside, including a spare gun that Purpled must just have laying around.

Then he grabs his gift.

He sprints back out to where Niki is standing there, clearly more than confused.

Tommy huffs slightly, doubling over mostly for dramatic effect. He’s pretty fit considering he is— was? Was a vigilante? It’s complicated and that’s putting it kindly.

He looks at Niki before handing it out to her.

It’s an octopus!

One of the ones that Wilbur technically stole from a hospital... which doesn’t seem super ethical but Tommy finds that he doesn’t care because he got some dope ass octopuses out of it.

So all in all, a pretty good deal for him.

And now he also has blackmail against Wilbur.

The octopus in his hand is an orange and yellow one, the orange side is a little frowny face and the yellow side is a smiley face, Tommy hands it to Niki and grins widely.

“That’s Citrus!”

“Citrus?” Niki says softly, taking the flippable octopus from Tommy and holding it with all the care in the world, “I love her.”

“Purpled and I very creatively named her,” Tommy explains, “Now, Niki— what’s your last name?”

“Matthews,” Niki says.

“Niki Matthews, do you promise to protect Citrus with your life?”

“I do.”

“Then you are now her parent, congrats!”

Niki just smiles at him softly, before reaching up and ruffling his hair.

Tommy yelps at that, trying to bat her hand away with little success.

Then Niki draws her hand back, seemingly content with the damage that she’s caused. Then she looks at Tommy for a moment longer, “Can I hug you goodbye?”

Tommy nods and finds himself wrapped up in a Niki hug. Niki's hugs are different, they’re gentler but still strong, and Tommy finds himself melting into this one as well, leaning his forehead against Niki’s shoulder.

Eventually, when Tommy’s read she lets go, smiling up at him.

“See you at Phil’s?”

“Yeah...” Tommy says quietly, “See you then.”

Niki shoots him one last smile before waving and walking out.

Tommy smiles to himself.

Then looks at all the fucking sausage rolls he has—

Was this a trick in making Tommy eat more food?

Because it works.

Tommy picks up a sausage roll eating it, they’re less good, slightly less warm but Tommy chomps into it again, enjoying his time.

It’s good.

Then before he knows it, without even thinking about it.

He has... eaten well over half of them.

Ah.

Alright then.

Tommy sighs, cleaning up the crumbs.

The apartment is quiet, but Tommy finds that the silence isn't suffocating, he can still smell the sausage rolls, and his oven is still humming quietly. There's wind rattling the windows and...

He doesn't feel alone.

Huh.

That's nice.

Tommy finds himself flopped on his bed after Niki leaves, he picks up a book like a sensible person.

Today makes sense, he's been wanting to read this book forever...

It's a good book and he's ready to fall into the world and the story and Purpled said he should read it and then Wilbur *also* said he should read it and...

Tommy's not sure why— but his eyes drift to his phone.

He knows why his eyes drift towards his phone.

Not just the... wanting to check Twitter instead of reading but...

He tries to ignore it.

Looking back at his book he sighs, he wants to read this book—

Really.

He does...

He could call Tubbo.

He could call Schlatt.

He could even call Ranboo if he was feeling fancy about it... he could— he could do all of that, he could speak with Tubbo again, even if it's just for closure... that's all it'll be— closure.

Yeah.

That.

Tommy pauses, his phone on the table feels like an insurmountable problem, he can pick it up — he could call someone, he could... he could talk with Schlatt, Schlatt's always been more reasonable and currently a bit kinder to Tommy.

He starts pacing.

He could call— maybe just ask about Tubbo.

Yeah!

No need to see him, he could just ask about Tubbo. Check-in on him, like a good friend would do. Yeah... just, just check in on Tubbo, that'll be all. And then—

Yeah.

Tommy picks up the phone.

He puts it down straight away.

Then he starts pacing again, up and down.

What if Schlatt yells at him—

Why would Schlatt yell at him?

But what if?

“This is so dumb,” Tommy announces to the empty room, “Thomas Underscore— oh. Yeah...”

Tommy pauses for a few moments.

Niki's whole “do one thing that's difficult thing.” Reverberates around in his brain.

Prime fucking help him.

He picks up the phone and turns it on.

Then drops it back onto the table.

He's making progress... he supposes? Maybe— if he squints really hard and prays to Prime and also Ender at the same time which isn't even possible and—

He pauses for a moment.

He needs Purpled advice.

Tommy has no hesitation in picking up his phone and calling Purpled.

Purpled answers in about two rings, *"Are you okay— do I need to come home?"*

"I need you to bully me into doing something I really don't want to do."

Purpled sighs on the other side of the phone, it's crackly but Tommy can feel the disappointment through the phone. *"Is it something that will get you hurt?"*

"... no?"

"Am not a fan of the hesitation in your voice, Innes."

"I have not gone by that name in like— years," Tommy sighs, taking a deep breath before spinning around. "I just need you to bully me into something, it'll probably have bad short-term consequences but good long-term consequences."

Purpled pauses, *“Okay, I’m coming home—”*

“What? No?” Tommy says, “I’m fine, really, I’m alright.”

“You’re worrying me.”

“Yeah, I do that,” Tommy murmurs, holding the phone away from his face for a few moments before bringing it back, “I just need you to call me a coward or something.”

Purpled sighs. *“Coward.”*

“Put some heart into it.”

“You have got to be kidding me.”

Tommy smiles, holding the phone closer to his face, “I’m not! Gotta have emotion in it.”

Purpled sighs again. *“Tommy, you’re a fucking coward who runs away from all his self-inflicted problems and leaves everyone else in the dust. For once in your life don’t run away from this mysterious thing that you’re not telling me about and deal with it.”*

Ouch.

Probably a bit too much heart.

They’re both quiet for a moment.

“You know I don’t mean that right—”

“See ya Purpled!” Tommy says, promptly hanging up the call.

He should probably never ask Purpled to do that again because Tommy does think he will cry if Purpled says something even slightly mean to him again.

Cool.

New boundary discovered.

Great.

Amazing for him—

Time for him to not enforce that ever in his life at all.

Tommy sighs, looking at the contact.

Schlatt.

He doesn’t have an icon picture, so it’s just a big letter S and that almost makes it funnier. He scrolls down a bit more.

Tubbo.

Huh.

He does have an icon on his contact— duh, it's a photo of both of them staring at the camera, at a very unflattering low angle and Tommy only knows he's in the photo because of a sorta blond blurry shape by Tubbo's side.

He finds himself smiling a little bit at that.

He scrolls back up to Schlatt's contact.

With a deep breath he steadies himself.

Then he clicks on the contact.

Now he has to go through with it.

It rings a few times, and Tommy finds himself pacing again, walking back and forwards as he tries to sort through... any of his thoughts, but sadly for him most of his thoughts are just... screaming.

Lots and lots of screaming.

It keeps ringing.

Tommy feels light-headed.

"What do you want, kid?" Schlatt asks, tone as deadpan and as difficult to figure out emotions from as Techno's. "How can I be of your service—"

“How’s Tubbo?” Tommy blurts out.

A moment of quiet on both sides.

“Why do you wanna know about Tubbo?” Schlatt asks slowly, “Saw what you did to Wilbur on the news— pretty fucked up, that’s a broken wrist for sure.”

“You think I’m gonna hurt him,” Tommy whispers.

Schlatt’s silence says it all.

“I wouldn’t— what the fuck. I’d never hurt Tubbo—”

“Did you say that about Wilbur too?” Schlatt asks.

Tommy’s blood runs cold.

He might actually pass out, his head feels dizzy and he can barely think, no thinking, only various screams going on in his head. And he... he doesn’t know what to do because Schlatt might be right— he might hurt Tubbo and he doesn’t want to hurt Tubbo and he should’ve fucking considered it.

“I just wanted to talk to him,” Tommy defends, his voice getting quieter. “I— I get what you’re saying though, sorry for bothering you.”

He hangs up before Schlatt says anything.

He stands there, all limbs shaking for a few moments before he sits down and tries to tell himself that he's not violent.

He's not a violent person.

He wouldn't hurt Tubbo.

The doubt that nudges the back of his mind says otherwise.

If Tubbo could turn back time he'd do a lot differently.

One thing he would not do differently, no matter what is to become friends with Tommy. Even if he found out being friends with Tommy would lead to certain death and look... with the way things are currently looking for him that might become a bit more accurate than he'd like.

Anyway, moving swiftly and quickly on from that.

He would do a lot differently, but never showing up in the alleyway near Tommy's apartment, and agreeing to have soup because Ranboo was on motherfucking death's door and he would have done... just about everything the same.

Then he'd change his behaviour after a fucking firework got shot in his face.

He wouldn't be an asshole who was lashing out for no good reason and he has so much guilt about it and he knows he doesn't deserve that guilt because he hurt Tommy and at some point he was planning what to say and do to hurt Tommy and make him hate him and...

Look.

Tubbo has made so, so, so, so, so, so many mistakes in his life. In fact the ‘so’ list could probably go on for about— forever. He’s made a lot of big mistakes and most of them are very recent and he’s still trying to figure them out and...

Being seventeen sucks.

The limbo age where you’re not legally an adult but the age where people think you should be an adult and Tubbo’s brain is not fully developed yet and he doesn’t know what he’s doing and...

In conclusion, being seventeen sucks.

This is beside the point he was making, the point he was making is that he’s made several mistakes in his life and he is painfully aware of all of them. In fact, he’s in the whole arc of Schlatt calling him an idiot and Tubbo agreeing.

Anyway, he’s eating dinner at the moment, having the time of his life as he flings peas at Ranboo, who seems incredibly unimpressed about the entire affair. Schlatt seems slightly amused at least.

“Oh, yeah,” Schlatt says and Tubbo looks away from Ranboo and his frowny unimpressed face and at Schlatt. “Tommy called me today, he asked about you.”

“He *what?* ” Ranboo asks, sitting up straighter and staring at Schlatt. “Tommy called—”

“What did he want?” Tubbo asks.

“He wanted to know if you’re alright,” Schlatt replies.

Tubbo's mouth falls open. "Really? After— after everything? Holy shit."

"Does Tommy need something?" Ranboo asks, "Because he'd rather die than swallow his pride."

"Ranboo shut the fuck up," Tubbo says, looking at Schlatt with wide eyes, "Did he ask to talk or something?"

Schlatt looks at him for a long moment. "Yes."

"Awesome!" Tubbo says, "You said yes right—"

Schlatt doesn't respond.

Tubbo's heart drops in his chest.

"Right?"

He had— maybe one chance to *try* and make things right Tommy, try and explain things and... and Schlatt just... fucking blew it? Just said no— for the fun of it? The fuck is wrong with this man—

Alright, Tubbo probably can't critique people for being fucked up.

He has a whole scar on his face to prove how he's fucked up.

Tubbo looks at Schlatt, hoping the sheer anger he's feeling is playing on his face as well because saying he's unhappy about this entire thing seems like a gross understatement. It feels like he's going to explode. It feels like boiling inside of him and Tubbo is not great at identifying his own emotions but he knows he's angry as fuck.

"The fuck!" Tubbo stands up, slamming his hands on the table. "Where's my phone?"

"I took it," Schlatt says.

"You can't— what? Why are you—"

Schlatt sighs, "Tubbo, you know I like Tommy. He's hilarious but— he's been worrying, with Wilbur and— he had less reasons to beat Wilbur up than reasons to fuckin' beat you up."

Ranboo shrugs, seemingly agreeing that's a good enough response.

"You think Tommy's gonna hurt me?" Tubbo shrieks, "What the fuck is wrong with you both? Ranboo do you even know Tommy, he'd rather stab himself than hurt me! Why are you both acting like he's the most evil person in the world? I was the one who hurt him, *a lot*."

Schlatt doesn't back down.

Tubbo isn't backing down easily.

"Tommy— was my best friend, and I fucked that up and I don't blame him at all for that, he did—"

Everything he could, was amazing and supportive up until being supportive would have actually broken something in him and Tubbo didn't want to see that thing break because Tommy almost always believed in him and—

“Everything he could, but I was determined to not be helped and he still wants to reach back out? That— that takes forgiveness or some sorta form of it and I need to talk to Tommy, I need to apologise and who the *fuck* do you think you are to take that away from me?”

Schlatt stares at him. “Your guardian.”

Tubbo grins, “Y’know, technically Thomas Underscore is still my guardian.”

“You’re living in my house, aren’t you?”

“You are sounding a *real* lot like my actual parents,” Tubbo snaps, “ ‘Yes, *Tubbo*, you should be grateful because I’m providing the bare minimum for you and since you live in my house you can’t question my authority since I’m a parent!’ What fucking bullshit? What are you playing at Schlatt?”

“I don’t want you hurt.”

“He’s not going to hurt me!” Tubbo yells, “Ranboo— tell him that he’s not gonna hurt me, it’s *Tommy* for fuck’s sake what are you on about? I want to apologise to him why are you stopping me from doing that?”

“Do you know how easy it would be for Theseus’s powers to kill you?” Schlatt snaps, “He can break a rib or snap a neck or—”

“Ranboo!” Tubbo yells.

Ranboo takes a deep breath, “First of all don’t yell at me.”

“Sorry.”

“Second of all,” Ranboo looks over at Schlatt, “I don’t like this, we can make our own decisions, Tubbo can make his own decisions and Tommy took the initiative, Tommy tends to be pretty stubborn.”

Schlatt scowls.

Tubbo goes quiet.

He tries to gather his thoughts into something that makes sense.

“Y’know,” he says, voice breaking slightly. “I’m not... I’m better! And I’m not going to fucking snap in half if I talk to someone, and Tommy’s not gonna hurt me and you’re both bastards for even *thinking* that he would.”

And Tubbo decides, for good measure, to pick up his butter knife and stab it into the table, because he has the skill to do that.

Schlatt almost lets himself look impressed.

Tubbo turns around, walking back to his bedroom and slamming the door.

Alright.

Fine.

Schlatt’s going to be an asshole? Tubbo’s going to figure this out himself, he doesn’t have his phone, Schlatt fucking took it like the worst helicopter parent and—

Why is he so adamant about him apologising to Tommy?

That would be all it is.

He's not gonna move back in with Tommy or something, they both deserve better than that and... looking back at them moving in together was probably a terrible idea especially with the inevitably codependency that came with that until Tubbo got any sort of income and...

Okay, now is not the time to delve over every single regret he has about his relationship with Tommy because he'd be here for— probably years.

Right.

Okay.

He'll fucking do this himself.

This is the hardest he's ever worked to apologise to someone but here he is.

He grabs his laptop, that's the first thing.

And the second thing... he did not think that far.

Back in the day when Tubbo was concerned about Tommy, he'd just hack his location, which is something Tommy knew about and was chill with provided that Tubbo would have attempted to contact him some other way before.

Tubbo... he's getting a little bit better at ethics.

He probably... should not do that.

Okay uh— plan two.

He does not have plan two.

He could call Purpled...

Okay, he'd rather his chances bullying Schlatt into getting his phone back than getting anything out of Purpled, which is fair, Tubbo isn't exactly a historically bearer of good news when it comes to Tommy's mental health.

Being self-aware is exhausting.

Worst mistake Tubbo ever made.

Okay.

He could— call Techno. Contact him, he's way easier to contact than Purpled or Tommy at this point.

Wait.

He could just find a phone.

Sure.

That would be— way simpler than the plan Tubbo was having involving hacking the TV stations.

Yeah, sure.

Mission: Acquire a phone.

Tubbo looks around.

Alright. No phone here.

He will have to look somewhere that is not his bedroom.

He glances at his bedroom window.

Sure. It's floor two, but Tubbo's pretty competent, child spy and all of that, he's pretty good at falling off of stuff and then falling off of more stuff and breaking his fall pretty well— apart from the times that he isn't.

Tubbo swings his window open, it doesn't open as far as Tubbo would like, but for now it's enough that he can peek his head out of the window and look around.

He sighs, sitting against the wall and leaning his head against it. Alright. Time to think about emotions and if he's making bad choices or not.

Schlatt is worried Tommy will be violent.

That's all, he's just trying to keep Tubbo safe, and Tubbo knows that logically, Schlatt is scared of Tommy starting a pattern of violence, but in Tubbo's opinion, one thing is not indicative of a potential pattern emerging.

In fact, almost never is one event a pattern.

So no... he's not too worried, Tommy was— probably having a bad day or something, and if not then Tubbo really doesn't think Tommy would hurt him.

He hopes not, anyway.

Nah, it's just Tommy.

Tubbo sighs.

Emotions are hard.

He should just stop having them—

That is called disassociation, he should not do that.

It would be easy—

“Tubbo no,” Tubbo says to himself.

For some reason speaking to himself like a child who is doing nefarious child things tends to work better than anything else.

The self-talk works, because Tubbo sighs, leaning his head back against the wall and debating every decision he's ever made in the history of decisions. He sighs.

Alright.

The emotions of Schlatt have been analysed. He's just scared for Tubbo.

And Tubbo... thinks that's bullshit.

Yeah, he's jumping out of the window.

Tubbo stands up, grabbing some spare change off his desk, and the large bomber jacket that he's become so attached to, pulling it over his shoulders before glancing over his shoulder.

He probably shouldn't block the door, that'll make them stress more.

Instead, he grabs a piece of paper, a scrap piece of working out paper and he hums for a moment, attempting to think of what to write.

Ah. He knows.

FUCK YOU SCHLATT

- *Love, Tubbo*

He nods at his messy scrawl that he calls handwriting before sticking it on his cupboard.

Yeah.

That's good.

Tubbo checks his pockets again, he has money, several knives on him and for some reason a small notebook in one of the pockets of his jacket, which is always good, Tubbo might need to write something down.

He sighs, before looking out the window.

Yeah, he can do that drop.

Tubbo sighs to himself.

What's being a teenager without a bit of teenage rebellion— if Schlatt's biggest issue in trying to look after him is him running off to try and apologise to someone he wronged then... they'll be okay.

And yes, Tubbo is aware he's had bigger issues before this. He had a whole arc, a very... very destructive one which ended in Schlatt saying "you are living here" and Tubbo agreeing.

And that other time with the—

Yeah, okay.

Tubbo will handle Schlatt being upset later.

Alright.

Okay.

Falling out of a window, yeah, that's something Tubbo can totally do.

Tubbo sticks his head out the window.

The door swings open.

Tubbo jumps, slamming his head on the top of the window and making a noise as he whirls around.

Ranboo's standing by the door, leaning against one side of it, arms crossed. "Are you sure this is a good idea?"

"I think Tommy needs this— I think I need this as well."

Ranboo hums for a few moments, looking down at the floor for a few moments, "It has been a while. I think we've all changed since then, for better and probably for worse. And— you know Tommy's being worrying."

"That's why I think someone has to reach out," Tubbo says, "Purpled— he's great, he's amazing with Tommy and an amazing friend but... I dunno, Purpled can probably handle it but I don't want him to be the only one handling anything alone."

Ranboo hums, thinking for a few moments.

"You don't— actually think he's gonna hurt me or something?" Tubbo asks.

Ranboo's entire face screws up, "No, no— never, it's Tommy. Tommy's— never really been violent, look one time he punched me in the face, we were... what, fifteen? And he whacked me in the face after waking up from a nightmare and he felt just... so incredibly bad about it."

Tubbo nods, starting to pace up and down, "We've all changed since then. It's been... like two years. We're not the same— I know that, and he knows that and... childhood best friends are difficult man."

Ranboo nods, sitting down on Tubbo's bed and crossing his legs underneath him. "Look. You have the courage to do so now, you're going to regret it if you don't." They tilt their head and give a small smile.

Tubbo sighs, "I just— y'know."

"I do," Ranboo says.

Tubbo sits on the bed next to Ranboo.

They both sit in silence for a few moments.

"Will you teleport me to a phone booth?"

"Do you know where one is?"

"Uh— on the corner between the shop where Tommy fell off a scooter and the one where that kid ran into a wall that one time."

Ranboo rolls his eyes, "I hate that I know what you mean."

“You don’t,” Tubbo returns, “You probably associate it with home or something cringy as shit.”

“You’re cringy.”

“You’re cringy.”

Ranboo grabs Tubbo by the arm, hauling both of them up onto their feet and taking a deep breath, “I have not done this in a while.”

Tubbo shrugs, “Don’t leave my arm behind.”

“Was not planning on it.”

“Well, you never know—”

The world spins around Tubbo, things falling over themselves as Ranboo and him seem to fall backwards and things swirl around them and—

Zwoop.

They land on their feet.

Tubbo’s head is still spinning and he has the urge to throw up, instead, he holds onto Ranboo’s arm and doubles over, trying not to actually throw up but he really, really, really wants to.

He doesn’t though!

Which is amazing.

Ranboo also seems impressed, they nod approvingly. “You’re getting better at that.”

“Next time I’m going to throw up in your face.”

“Charming,” Ranboo deadpans, “Well, there’s your phone box.”

Tubbo stares at it, there’s change in his pocket and— holy fuck is he nervous about this entire thing, he looks at Ranboo. “Maybe I can do this another time— teleport me back.”

Ranboo grabs his arm, stopping him from running off and Tubbo frowns.

They stare at each other for a moment.

“If you don’t do it now, you never will.”

Ranboo lets go of his arm.

Tubbo huffs, turning around and walking towards the phone booth, he swings open the door before propping it open with his foot.

He fumbles with the money in his pocket before managing to push a couple of coins in and he picks it up, holding it to his ear. He knows Tommy’s phone number off by heart— they learnt each other’s in case the police or something found them.

Which in hindsight is hilarious.

But now Tubbo's hands are shaking as he starts to dial the number.

He dials it, before holding the phone up to his ear and sighing.

Alright then.

It rings a few times and Tubbo's stomach drops.

"Huh?" Tommy's voice comes in through over the phone and Tubbo can't even hide the smile on his face, and he has no reason to.

"Uh— hi," Tubbo says, his hands start shaking and the phone he's holding shakes with it.
"Hi, Tommy."

"Tubbo."

That's foreboding.

"Uh— hi, uh— Schlatt said you called for me and then well, he had a whole thing about that and I thought he was being stupid so I snuck out and now I'm at a telephone box and— Ranboo's also here."

"Hello," Ranboo yells.

He hears silence on the other side of the phone.

"Oh, yeah— anyway, he said that you said that you wanted to talk— and if you don't wanna talk that's okay, I get that and I'm not gonna hold that against you, but I figured no time like now, y'know. So uh— if you want to talk can you tell me?"

“I dunno. I did but—”

Oh.

“That’s okay,” Tubbo says, “I— I get it, and I’m not gonna push it if you don’t want to but uh — yeah. Yeah...”

“How have you been?” Tommy asks.

And Tubbo almost wants to cry, because there is no reason for Tommy to be concerned about him, and Tubbo is so worried about Tommy and of course he’d ask Tubbo because Tommy is the fucking best and—

“Good,” Tubbo manages, “I’ve been— really good, uh— uh Schlatt made me start seeing a therapist which is fucking wild, and she’s lovely, even if I want to fight her sometimes but it’s... it’s been good. And I’m rambling, how have you been?”

“I’m alive.”

That is... an incredibly low bar.

But hey, Tommy got over it, which is still getting over a bar and... yeah.

“Where would we even meet?”

Tubbo looks over at Ranboo, who can not hear what Tommy is saying but he still looks over at them. Ranboo looks about as lost as Tubbo feels and Tubbo pauses for a few moments.

“The bench?” Tubbo says.

A mostly neutral location and Tubbo’s eyes immediately dart over to the direction of Tnret Park, it’s not super close by but Tubbo knows his way around Logstedchire like nothing else.

A moment of silence on the other side.

“Okay.”

Holy shit.

Tubbo’s... done it.

“Does uh— four work? I still have school and I might be a little bit late but—”

“That’s fine.”

Another moment of silence.

Tommy hangs up.

Tubbo looks over at Ranboo, before giving them a bright smile.

Ranboo gives an equally bright one back.

“This is a fucking terrible idea.”

“Another terrible idea was when you ate that funky chicken a couple of days ago, and you did that.”

“You are not comparing meeting Tubbo to me eating some funny chicken.”

“Kinda seems like that’s exactly what I’m doing,” Tommy says, “It’s fine, Tubbo can’t hurt me.”

Purpled looks at him for a long moment, “That’s not what I’m worried about.”

“You’re worried about everything.”

“Fine then,” Purpled mutters, “I hope he punches you in the face—”

“You simply do not,” Tommy says, pushing the door open with his shoulder, which swings open. “You’re gonna feel bad if he does punch me.”

“He won’t,” Purpled says and there’s something more serious in his eyes at that, his eyes are still firmly on his bag which he’s taking stuff out of and putting it on the counter, he hums for a moment. “Nah, he won’t.”

“How do you know that?”

Purpled pauses for a moment before looking up, as usual not doing the whole eye contact thing. Which isn’t too shocking. Then a small smile crosses across Purpled’s face. “Because I knew Tubbo for a while, and if he wanted to punch you in the face he’d already be here.”

“Force of fucking nature,” Tommy mutters, “Okay, bye, hate you.”

“Now at least try to sound convincing.”

“Goodbye Purpled.”

He steps outside of the door, the nerves basically eating him alive.

It’ll be fine.

He shoves his hands in his pockets and basically sprints down the stairs, a bike almost knocks him over and they both yell at each other, before Tommy heads off to Tnret.

It doesn’t take super long to get to Tnret, it never really has, that was why it became the area that Ranboo, Tubbo and Tommy would spend so much time in, just because it was a big open area.

He barely thinks about where he goes, and it’s more like his legs carry him, or something in the back of his mind, long engraved takes him there.

When he reaches the gates, he zones back in, before sighing.

He takes a couple of steps through the gates, and soon the bench comes into view.

Tubbo’s there already, and Tommy would love to pretend his anxiety doesn’t spike.

He almost turns around and runs away.

Tubbo is sitting there on the bench, he's in his school uniform because he goes to some fucking rich person's school, Tommy knows, he helped Tubbo get enrolled there. On the side of him is his homework, and on his lap is a textbook that looks about the size of Tubbo's head.

He looks just... like a normal teenager.

Tubbo reaches over to his side, picking up a notebook and writing something down, before highlighting the section in his textbook. He frowns at the textbook which— mood.

Tommy takes a deep breath, taking a few more steps towards the focus boy.

“Afternoon,” Tommy says.

Tubbo doesn't jump, the way he probably would've a while ago, instead he looks at Tommy, tilting his head and smiling a little bit. Before his face drops and he looks at the papers and books around him, “Oh, shit— sorry you didn't show up on time so I just— uh— I'll clean it.”

Tommy takes a few steps over, helping collect the papers and handing them to Tubbo who murmurs a thank you and shoves his papers into his bag, probably crumpling most of them.

They both stare at each other.

“So...” Tommy says, “What... did you wanna talk about?”

Tubbo takes a deep breath, “So, so, so much I will be completely honest with you— I just have so much to say and it's all gonna come out in one and if you gotta— I dunno ask a question, stop me.”

Tommy just crosses his arms.

He doesn't sit down on the bench.

He's not ready to cross that invisible boundary that still lies between them.

Tubbo takes another deep breath, "Wow I have run through this conversation in my head so much and suddenly I can not say a word at all— uh, uh— I'd, first of all, like to say I am so, so sorry for the way I treated you. There's no justification, I was being an asshole and I am so sorry that I hurt you."

Tommy raises an eyebrow, "Do you need money or something?"

"Can you assume the best in people one time?" Tubbo snarks back.

Tommy goes quiet.

He forgot that no one can humble him quite like Tubbo can.

Tubbo sighs, "I am sorry. I was a fucking asshole for no real reason—"

"I hope there was at least *some* of a reason."

Tubbo sighs, leaning back on the bench and looking up at the sky, "Okay... open communication, that's important I guess. My therapist told me that y'know."

"You go to therapy?"

“Yeah,” Tubbo murmurs, “It sucks. So many questions about my parents— like thank you very much I can be fucked up without my parents being involved.”

“Are you... allowed to talk about everything?” Tommy asks, “Like the—”

“Spying and the fighting rings?” Tubbo looks at Tommy, “Yeah. I talk about those a lot actually, turns out those fucked me up more than I thought they did. I also talk about the scar,” Tubbo smiles at that, but it seems a bit strained. “I think she thinks I’m in a gang but I’m very much not.”

“Therapy is very great and I’m very proud of you but—”

“You should go,” Tubbo says, “You wouldn’t even have to talk about being—” he glances around, “Being Theseus and you’d have enough to talk about that would make a grown therapist start sobbing.”

“Y’know I didn’t tell you everything about my past at like four in the morning when I was fourteen for you to tell me to go to therapy. You were supposed to be like ‘skill issue’ rather than be concerned for me almost three years later.”

Tubbo shrugs, “Look, on the bright side you could make a therapist cry and that’s just while your parents were alive—”

“Be quiet.”

Tubbo looks at him for a long moment, “Nah, I don’t think I will.”

“I will punch you in the face.”

Tubbo stands up. “Sure. Go for it.”

“What?”

Tubbo just grins.

“Tubbo are you like alright?”

Tubbo grins, grabbing Tommy’s wrist, “Punch me in the face, it might be relieving.”

“I’m not gonna punch you in the face!”

Tubbo lets go of Tommy’s wrist, “You’re so boring.”

“Sorry?”

“You should be,” Tubbo announces.

Tommy almost tells Tubbo that he missed hanging out like this.

Talking shit, saying words that don’t make sense, like a dictionary on shuffle. He almost lets himself admit it, that he’s missed Tubbo this entire time, and even when he thought he didn’t he just... he just did.

But no. He’s stubborn.

He’ll die before he tells Tubbo that he’s missed him.

They both look at each other.

“Tommy...” Tubbo says, “I— if I talk to you a little bit about what happened can you promise to not— push some things? I— I want to tell you eventually, really, I do but I just— I don’t think I’m ready for it.”

Tommy watches him for a long moment.

“Okay. Only talk about the shit you’re ready to talk about.”

Tubbo sighs, running a hand through his hair.

It’s grown a lot longer, it covers his eyes almost completely, it’s wavier than it was when it was shorter, and Tubbo has to push it out of his eyes quite a lot. Tommy really thinks the logical situation would be to cut it, but he’s not Tubbo.

Tommy almost sits down next to Tubbo, before thinking better of it.

He can see Tubbo sitting right next to one of the carvings.

It’s Ranboo’s.

Tommy finds himself smiling at that.

He doesn’t mean to, but it’s too late to hide it.

Tubbo smiles at him as well.

“So uh— yeah I got blackmailed.”

“Oh, mood,” Tommy says, before looking at Tubbo, “Wait you got what?”

“You’re being blackmailed?” Tubbo yells back at him at the same time, their voices overlapping, “That fuck do you mean you’re being blackmailed?”

“I— I’m being blackmailed? I dunno— Sam knows I’m Theseus and Purpled says he’s being odd.”

“You’re being blackmailed by a fucking hero?”

Tommy pauses for a moment before humming, “Huh. I am.”

Tubbo sighs, running a hand down his face, “The *fuck* Tommy? I leave you alone for a couple of months and you’re fucking being blackmailed?”

“Yeah.”

“The *fuck* ?”

“Well I didn’t *mean* to,” Tommy mutters, “It’s not like I went ‘*Sam my life is too easy, please start potentially blackmailing me, it’s all I’ve ever wanted.*’ Did I?”

“I would not put that past you.”

“That is a reasonable point,” Tommy replies, before sitting back in the seat and tilting his head back so he’s looking up at the sky, “This is bullshit. This entire fucking thing is bullshit.”

Tubbo nods, patting Tommy on the shoulder, it's a little condescending but Tubbo's always been a little condescending, it's how he shows affection.

"Now, you?"

"Oh yeah... uh they shot a firework at my face because they wanted information out of me—I don't wanna say about what yet, or who— wow, I am really not telling you a lot, am I?"

"More than nothing."

"Yeah... so," Tubbo looks at the ground, kicking a rock with his shoe, "That happened and they kept fucking— contacting me, and that was stressing me the fuck out, as you would assume, so I kinda took it out on you, and I am so sorry for that."

Tommy just watches him.

"My frustration and fear and— everything else just kinda melted into one big boiling pot and— well you didn't know what was happening, Ranboo did, and I still got all snappy at them and— that's besides the point."

Tommy just watches him.

Tubbo gives an awkward smile, "I'm probably going to cry over this dammit," he wipes at his eyes with his sleeve before giving Tommy a fake smile, "I'm not allowed to cry over this fucking dammit."

"You don't need to earn your right to cry," Tommy replies, crossing his arms and looking at Tubbo.

“I was an asshole to you and now I’m going to cry about it.”

“Shows regret,” Tommy says with a half smile, “I mean— that’s good at least.”

Tubbo laughs, there’s little humour in his voice as he looks up at Tommy, “I’m sorry.”

Tommy looks at him for a long moment.

Neither of them say much.

“And I don’t wanna— keep fighting with you, I am... so tired of fighting with you, fighting with you fucking sucks— and I know I instigated most of the time but I am still just... so, so done with fighting you.”

“Me too,” Tommy finds himself saying, his voice breaks a little bit and he looks at Tubbo. “I hate fighting with you.”

Then he sits down next to Tubbo.

Both of them are on the bench.

If Tommy tries hard enough he can almost imagine when they were thirteen, Tommy was significantly shorter (Tubbo has barely grown since thirteen which he’s not enthused about.) And both are a lot more awkward and unsure of themselves.

They seem a bit surer now.

Just as confused, but Tommy likes to think he knows more about who he is now that he’s sixteen, almost seventeen, than he was when he was younger, but still it feels like he knows

nothing.

Maybe deep down he's always going to be a confused thirteen-year-old, unsure about the world and his place in it.

Tommy sighs.

"Hey... Tubbo? Do you and Ran wanna come over for dinner sometime in the future?"

And judging by the way that Tubbo's face lights up, Tommy would say that's just about everything that Tubbo has ever wanted.

"Yeah," Tubbo says grinning, "Yeah— that would be cool."

Tommy grins as well, before nudging Tubbo's shoulder with his own, "This isn't forgiveness."

"Honestly?" Tubbo says, "I thought I was going to get punched in the face at least a little bit, so I am going to consider this as a win."

Tommy just sighs, he's leaning against Tubbo slightly, and Tubbo is leaning against him.

They're holding each other up.

Tubbo sighs again, "How's it been going? I mean— I was blackmailed for about a month and yelled at you about it, and then got Schlatt involved and now I'm being left alone. How have you been filling in your time?"

Tommy... is a little bit dramatic, but he *swears* everything from Tubbo getting shot with a firework to now pops in his head.

Two wild months.

He has: beaten up the leader of a fighting ring who may or may not be dead now, been in the hospital and had Wilbur steal toys from a hospital vending machine, learnt that he can kinda throw people into their worst memories, attacked Wilbur and Fundy, accidentally became the leader of a protest movement that he does not want to be a part of, worked with Elysium that one time, found out that the tower and government were responsible for the widespread blue epidemic.

Oh, and almost got arrested for being Theseus, by Techno.

“Not much,” Tommy says instead of explaining all that.

Tubbo, Tubbo knows him pretty well, because he just raises an eyebrow at Tommy, the most doubtful expression that Tommy has ever seen on someone’s face. “You’re telling me, you, Thomas Underscore, stayed out of trouble for two months?”

“Exactly.”

Tubbo just looks at him, “So— the things I know are that you are being blackmailed by a hero, worked with Elysium, beat up two of your friends— and now people keep putting Theseus on protest signs?”

“Yup.”

“And that’s just the stuff I do know,” Tubbo continues.

“Yup.”

“Thomas.”

“Tobias.”

Tubbo shakes his head, “I— y’know those memes of people calling their long-distance friends and they get the infodump for the week, this feels like that apart from the fact you are — you.”

“That’s so kind and thoughtful.”

“I try to be, every day I wake up and go, ‘ *oh how can I be more kind and thoughtful to everyone around me?* ’ And then I insult the shit out of them.”

“Oh!” Tommy says brightly, “Another thing that happened— for like two weeks I had this weird power suppressing cuff on my wrist,” he looks down where it was, “So— I couldn’t use my powers.”

Tubbo squints at him for a moment.

“At all?”

“At all,” Tommy repeats.

“Do your powers even work?” Tubbo asks, “That seems like a really long time to not be able to use them when you use them daily—”

“Yeah,” Tommy says quietly because it’s... his powers, of course, they’re working, his powers are always working that’s just... that’s just one of the consistent things in his life, his powers work.

Yeah... they're fine.

His powers are fine.

He smiles at Tubbo who looks doubtful.

“Are you *sure* —”

“Yeah,” Tommy says, and he feels like he has too much confidence in his voice because a little voice at the back of his brain tells him otherwise.

Tubbo just nods, “Y’know, you’re taking this a lot better than I thought you would.”

Tommy agrees.

He’s always tended to be a bit more likely to hold a grudge, nowhere on Purpled’s level, Tommy thinks it’s impossible for anyone to hold a grudge as much as Purpled does, but Tommy doesn’t really do the ‘forgive and forget’ thing.

And yeah, he’s taking this well.

Tubbo’s right to point it out, that he’s almost taking it too well.

The reason why is pretty simple.

“I missed you,” Tommy whispers, “I guess— I guess that’s all there is to it. I missed you.”

Tubbo looks like he's about to burst into tears.

“And— yeah not everything is fine, and I don't reckon it will be for a while, I'm still mad about everything and you still regret everything and... I think that's alright? I think it's okay for now, I just— don't want to no longer be on speaking terms for the rest of my life.”

“Me neither,” Tubbo snuffles, “I should not be crying—”

“You don't need to deserve to be able to cry,” Tommy repeats again.

Tubbo seems to take it on board at least a little this time because he nods his head and sets his shoulders back a little bit.

“You don't realise how much you miss someone until you're talking to them again,” Tommy says, “Dunno how I fucking survived as Theseus without you.”

“Sheer spite,” Tubbo says.

Tommy finds himself agreeing, not that he'd tell Tubbo that, he'd die before telling Tubbo that, but it does feel like... a lot of why he keeps moving is spite, or a need to survive or— something else that a therapist would probably have a fucking field day with.

Someone should do a case study on Tommy.

“You alright?” Tubbo asks, “You went all spacey.”

“I hate how well you know me.”

“You don’t.”

He doesn’t.

But again, he will die before he admits that to Tubbo.

“I will list off everything I know about you,” Tubbo threatens.

“You know literally everything about me.”

“Exactly, that’s why it’s a threat. I will reveal your favourite ice cream flavour to the world.”

“You don’t know—”

“It’s fuckin’ mandarin and fennel, you had it once at a fancy ice cream shop and you’ve never found it again.”

“How do you even—”

Tubbo taps the side of his head, like that narrows down anything, but instead, it narrows down nothing and Tommy is left even more confused as to how Tubbo knows his super specific favourite ice cream flavour he ate when he was like eight.

Sure.

Then the bench starts shaking.

Because Tommy is a person who lives in L'Manberg his first assumption is that there's a villain or a superhero with some sort of earthquake power around.

Then he realises that he's sitting next to Tubbo.

And Tubbo is staring at the buzzing phone in his hand.

So no, it's not some sort of threat they need to handle, it's just Tubbo's phone ringing in his hand.

Tommy looks at the phone in Tubbo's hand which is buzzing.

He watches as Tubbo notices who the caller is, "Ah," is the intelligent words Tubbo utters, before putting his phone face down on the bench and allowing it to keep ringing.

Tommy side-eyes him.

Tubbo side-eyes him back, but with about a thousand times the sass that Tommy has.

"Who?" Tommy asks.

With a groan, Tubbo covers his face with both hands and leans back on the bench.

"Schlatt, he's been a right fucking asshole about all of this."

And Tommy...

Tommy has spoken to Schlatt recently, and Schlatt wasn't particularly kind to him.

For once in his life, Tommy isn't going to try questioning this, because he thinks he already knows the answer.

And he doesn't need to hear the reason he thinks Schlatt is concerned about this from Tubbo.

"If I answer him I probably have to go home," Tubbo says.

Then Tommy finds himself grinning, and for a moment it feels like before all of this. When it was just Tubbo and Tommy with bad ideas and trying to survive against the absolute fuckery of L'Manberg.

Tommy grins, "What if I pick up the phone?"

"He'd have a fucking heart attack," Tubbo is also grinning the same Cheshire cat grin that Tommy has on his own face.

And like that, it's decided.

Tommy grabs the phone up from on the bench and accepts the call, holding it to his ear.

"Tubbo, I swear to fucking Ender—"

"Ender?" Tommy repeats, "Just because Tubbo says that doesn't mean you have to Schlatt, Prime is far superior."

"Neither of them are real!" Tubbo yells in the background and Tommy knows Schlatt can hear it, "It's just phrasing."

“You’re just a phrase.”

“What does that even *mean* ?”

What Tommy hears, is a long, tired sigh from Schlatt over the other side of the phone.

“Could you please pass the phone to Tubbo?”

“No.”

Schlatt sounds slightly murderous and incredibly tired.

“Can you tell Tubbo that he can talk to you another time? And I’m making pasta for dinner.”

Tubbo sits up a little bit straighter at that, “Is it penne?”

“Yes.”

Tubbo turns to look at Tommy, “Would you be offended if I left for pasta?”

“Dude, I’d fucking betray you for pasta.”

Tubbo grabs his phone off Tommy, “Okay, I’m coming home for pasta, love you, bye.” And he hangs up the phone.

Tommy

“Glad we’re on the same page,” Tubbo says, starting to pick up all his things, and Tommy helps by passing him a textbook, “Uh— if I come over soon there might be some leftover pasta.”

Tommy snorts, “I’ll just make Schlatt make it for me when I go over.”

“Oh,” Tubbo brightens up at that, smiling again, “Yeah— you should come over at some point, Schlatt has this really fucking cool gaming room, he has like a VR and a computer with *three* monitors.”

“That feels like an absurd amount of monitors.”

“That’s what I said!” Tubbo yells, throwing his hands out either side of him and hitting Tommy in the side of the head, “Oh, shit, sorry.”

“Ow.”

“I’d do it again, don’t be a bitch about it.”

“You hit me in the face!”

Tubbo seems to consider that for a moment, “Excellent point. I apologise very deeply and sincerely for hitting you in the side of the face.”

“I hate you.”

“If you did I’d be dead!” Tubbo responds brightly, shoving a textbook into his backpack, the textbook seems far too big for the area Tubbo’s trying to stuff it in, but Tommy isn’t going to doubt Tubbo’s ability to shove things in his bag. “Everyone you’ve actually hated is dead.”

“I’ve never actually hated anyone.”

“Lies and also slander.”

Tubbo ends up kneeling on the ground, shoving the textbook into his backpack with all the force he can muster.

With a well-timed shove, Tubbo manages to get his textbook in his bag.

He stands up and throws his bag over his back, watching Tommy for a long moment.

“Well...” Tubbo says, kicking a pebble with his foot which skids across the ground and hits the leg of the chair with a tiny *clang*. “See you around?”

“You betcha,” Tommy returns.

“I have so many memes I’ve been wanting to send you, prepare for funny cat reaction pictures for days.”

“I thought you would have gotten a better sense of humour.”

“Nope!” Tubbo shakes his head.

He takes a few steps back, but he hesitates like he doesn’t really want to go, and Tommy doesn’t really want him to leave.

A moment of silence when both of them don't really want to leave, and they settle in the silence of the Summer afternoon, there's kids playing in a park nearby and Tommy's pretty sure the ducks are pestering someone.

It's nice.

Just sitting in silence with Tubbo.

"Alright," Tubbo says, snapping both of them out of whatever trance they were in, "I gotta go — Schlatt's probably not gonna be happy, and then I am going to send an absurd amount of cat pictures."

"I expect no less from you."

Tubbo nods, hesitating for a moment as if he wants a hug or something.

Then he seems to correctly realise they're not at that level again, and instead, he gives the cheesiest small wave that Tommy has ever seen.

Tommy waves back, for some reason. "See ya, Tubbo."

"See ya!"

They stare at each other for a moment longer, and Tommy knows that not everything is fixed. Fuck, they barely even scratched the surface, but... it might get better, it is being better right now, they're joking and laughing and spending time with each other and they have plans to spend time again.

It's not fixed.

But it's better than it was, and Tommy thinks the both of them can feel that in the air.

Tubbo turns around and walks off, towards the gates of the park. He hesitates by the gate again.

He turns around and gives Tommy a much bigger wave, as he grins.

Tommy can't help but grin back and watch as Tubbo seems to be more content with himself because of that, and then turn around and walk down the street.

For a moment Tommy sits there.

Then he laughs.

It really was that simple all along, all that overthinking and anger and everything else that Tommy had held on for... months, for so fucking long, all of it was resolved with a single conversation.

He stands up, stretching slightly.

Then he laughs again.

Smiling to himself, he walks out of the park and heads off towards home.

He walks for a bit, in relative calm. The streets are starting to clear out, people are going home. The sun is still in the sky, and it will be for much longer.

Then something bright catches his eyes.

It's a mural.

Tommy stops in the middle of the footpath, staring up at the mural that stares down at him, there's a certain condescending nature in the way the mural seems to bore down into him.

The mural is on the side of an old abandoned building, one of many in Logstedchire.

It's of... well Theseus, who is technically him, he supposes.

He stares at it, it's a stunning one, of him more closed up, staring into the eyes of whoever is looking at the mural, looking straight ahead with unseeing eyes hidden behind the goggles that Tommy wears.

Around the side of his head is the jagged, messy magic that is his own powers, but interlaced with it, are sections of gold. As the lightning-shaped powers get further out from his head, they turn into gold.

It makes him look like some sort of... otherworldly being, surrounded by golden powers.

He stares at it.

For a long time, he just finds himself standing on the street and staring at the mural in front of him, it feels like all the air has been knocked out of him. He's being portrayed as... more than human.

As a concept rather than a person.

“It’s pretty neat ain’t it?” Someone says and Tommy turns to look at them.

It’s a younger person, with a beanie over their head, and slightly longer than shoulder-length hair. They cross their arms and look up at the mural in front of them.

Tommy finds his eyes darting back up there as well.

“It’s like Theseus is some kinda fuckin’ deity, watching over all of us.”

“It’s stupid,” Tommy says, “There’s... a person behind the mask and goggles.”

“Huh,” the person says, tilting their head slightly, “suppose you’re right. I’m Aimsey Teese — I use he/she/they and neos as well.”

“Tommy...” Tommy says quietly, “Uh— I use he/him.”

“Basic. Collect the pronouns.”

“I’m good.”

“You’re no fun,” Aimsey says, before looking back up at the mural again.

Both of them watch the mural in heavy silence.

“I think people think Theseus is going to save us all, that’s he’s— some fuckin’ sort of protagonist who’s going to break through all the oppression and save us.”

“That’s not how that works,” Tommy says, “One person can’t save us all. We need collective action.”

“I agree,” there’s something knowing on Aimsey’s face, something that Tommy is both incredibly invested in, and something that he knows better than, he knows that he should be running away from someone with that expression.

He has enough going on as it is.

“Hey, Tommy? Have you ever wondered what would happen if... the heroes went on strike?”

“Pardon?”

“Nevermind, nevermind,” Aimsey shakes her head, “The heroes are a bit useless anyway, you want the administrators, the organisers, the people who keep the tower actually running.”

Tommy watches him for a moment before his mouth quirks up into a smile. “I think it would be interestin’.”

“Me too...” Aimsey says, “Me too.”

“Well, I gotta be off, don’t want Mr Saviour looking down at me like that,” Tommy finds himself more than comfortable with the way he slips into his accent and Aimsey seems to be doing the same. “Nice to meet you.”

“You too.”

And Tommy walks off, putting his hands in his pockets and trying to ignore the eyes that are on his back. It’s hard to tell if it’s the fucking mural looking at him, or Aimsey looking at him.

He knows the look in Aimsey's eyes.

Rebellion seems like too simple of a word for it, but Tommy deep down wishes Aimsey luck on whatever she's trying to do.

He walks a bit longer, watching bits of paper flick over themselves and leaves fly around. People walking and cars zooming past far beyond the speed limit, the curfew should be soon.

Oh shit, the curfew is soon.

Tommy finds himself moving a little bit faster at that.

He gets home, clambering up the stairs and reaching the front door.

The first thing he does is well... open the door.

The second thing is try to pick up the book he's been trying to read for... a day now.

And once again, instead of reading his mind jumps to something else, because of course it fucking does.

He tries to focus but...

It can't hurt to check, right?

He probably shouldn't.

He doesn't need to know the answer.

He's not even Theseus anymore, Thomas Underscore doesn't even need powers, Theseus needs powers and he's not even Theseus anymore.

But every time he tries to put the thought away, Tubbo's questioning of if his powers even still work bounces around in his mind.

Do they?

Eventually, curiosity gets the better of him.

He finds himself sitting on the floor, cross-legged.

In front of him is a piece of paper, one that Tommy ripped out of a notebook that Purpled left laying around, it has a shopping list on it.

Alright.

Sure.

Using his powers.

Yup, that's something he's really good at.

He sighs, hands out in front of him.

Right.

This is easy, he can just— use his powers.

Now, how the fuck does he do that?

He's used to the sort of buzzing in the back of his head, something that means he can harness it, and something that means he knows it's there. Because it is, but right now Tommy doesn't have that.

He doesn't have that... feeling he needs.

At this point he barely consciously uses his powers, he could just put out a hand and then what he wanted to happen would happen, without him even thinking about it.

He sighs, looking at the paper.

Then he tries to lift it, but he's not sure how to lift it if he's being honest. He's never been— good at any of that stuff, nor has he tried to be good at it. How his powers work has always been beyond him.

The paper doesn't move.

That's...

Odd.

He tries to move the paper again, thinking about what it would look like if it lifted into the air and how'd it feel.

Nothing.

There's no familiar buzz or anything that ticks him off to the fact he even has powers.

Does... he even have powers?

This isn't like the times his powers falter for a few moments when he claps and sparks fly out of his hands. Even then he knew his powers were still there, there was still that— something in the back of his brain.

It's not there anymore.

Again, he tries to lift the piece of paper, staring at it intensely.

He can imagine it lifting into the air and how'd it fall and—

Nothing.

He stares down at his hands.

His powers aren't working.

Like *properly* not working.

“Holy shit,” Tommy stares at the piece of paper. “Holy fucking shit.”

Chapter End Notes



Chapter Summary:

- Techno saw Tommy have a breakdown and was like “OKAY YOU ARE ON BREAK FOR TWO AND A HALF WEEKS” so that’s where Tommy’s been
- Tommy is depressed, that’s it, that’s the chapter
- Wilbur reveals that he has nightmares because of Theseus! And he has a bit of a breakdown to Techno and is like “CAN YOU PLEASE STOP DEFENDING THE PERSON WHO GAVE ME TRAUMA?” And Techno is like “... good point.” (but they hug at the end so everything is fine)
- He is sad and watches Kung-Fu panda edits (THIS IS IMPORTANT!!!!)
- Niki Nihachu shows up! She gets the power cuff off his wrist and they make sausage rolls, while making sausage rolls, Tommy tells Niki he doesn’t want to be Theseus anymore. THAT’S RIGHT THIS MFER FINALLY QUIT BEING THESEUS REJOICE
- He gets invited to Niki’s 20th birthday party that’s in a few days
- Tommy’s sausage rolls that he rolled up look different though, and that starts a whole breakdown with our boy
- TUBBO AND TOMMY MAKE UP (WHAT????) basically we find out that Tubbo was being blackmailed (he won’t say by who or about what) and he was a bit stressed about that situation. But he’s VERY sad he took it out on Tommy and Tommy missed Tubbo a lot because they’re besties FR
- At the end of the chapter Tommy tries to use his powers and... they don’t work, and now Tommy doesn’t have Theseus OR his powers I hope this doesn’t end badly for him /s

The mural of Theseus that Tommy and Aimsey see at the end of the chapter? Yeah Rozy (THE BELOVED BETA READER) fucking read that and did [ART OF IT!](#) BEFORE THE CHAPTER WAS OUT, this is exactly what I imagined, so go send Rozy some love /threat

And here is what I call the ‘oh shit the world is exploding around me while I'm trying to eat my pizza roll’ arc, because SO many things are happening and Tommy is just trying to work on himself.

I think updates are going to be slower, due to me going into my last year of high school, dealing with uni and also just wanting to put more effort and time into my chapters. And wanting to work on other stuff as well. So... buckle up ig?

In Which Wilbur Drops the Tragic Backstory

Chapter Summary

Wilbur sighs, crossing his arms before glancing at Tommy. “The warehouse collapse is a nicer phrasing for my accident, which is a nicer way of saying a traumatic event.”

Tommy screws up his face, “I dunno about that, no one’s told me about that.”

“When I was fourteen. Uh— somethin’ happened. Fucked me up for a bit— still kinda fucks me up if I’m being honest.”

some more events, including but not limited to:

- wilbur finally drops why he's like THAT
- niki turns 20
- techno is VERY brother coded
- and a surprise character has a birthday!

Chapter Notes

Hello. it is me. ellis (that is generally implied) welcome back to TINAAOS WOOO WOOOO WOOOOP, as you can see by the title. uh. yes. welcome back. if you look at the title chapter, you will also see that!

also the warning list for some reason is... pretty long despite this being a prettyyyyy light-hearted chapter

Warnings: mentions and discussions about overdosing and drugs and needles, alcohol mention, discussions about mental health and depression, drowning (AS A METAPHOR), referenced abuse, graphic depictions of violence (TALKED ABOUT NOT SHOWN)

as always, summary at the end, skip over parts you are uncomfortable with, wilbur's backstory is... kinda rough, but VERY important to who he is, so have fun!!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“I just think that you are wrong,” Quackity says fondly, hitting Sapnap in the arm, “Mango is clearly superior.”

“Why would you say that when raspberries exist?” Sarnap exclaims, throwing both arms up in the air. Then he scowls and brings his arms back down to take another bite out of his sandwich.

Currently, the three of them are holed up in the cafeteria, eating their amazing sandwiches as they ignore the very public argument that Wilbur and Phil are having.

It’s a bit amusing, because Quackity is trying to pay attention to the argument and Sarnap and George at the same time, but is wildly failing at both and only half-aware of what’s happening in both.

Luckily, George hears the all-too-familiar footsteps behind him, so he can prepare himself and try not to jump or flinch.

George doesn’t flinch when Sam puts his hand on his shoulder, but he does turn around and school his expression because he’s in front of Sarnap and Quackity and he doesn’t want to worry them.

Sam looks down at him, expression not exactly happy.

George knows he hasn’t done anything, they’ve barely spoken since then, there’s no way he can have done anything. But still, his breath seems to get caught in his throat and it feels like he’s a kid again, waiting to be berated by his mother or father.

“I need to talk to you,” Sam says curtly.

He walks off.

Quackity squints at Sam’s retreating figure and George ducks his head, eating his sandwich and refusing to make eye contact with Sarnap.

George eats the rest of the sandwich, basically shoving it in his mouth, before swinging his legs back over the bench and standing up.

Sam will probably get pissed at him, for taking too long, he seems like that kind of guy—

He starts to head towards the door.

“Hey,” Sapnap says.

George turns to face him.

“Is everything— alright?” His face has a level of seriousness, his eyes are slightly narrowed and he’s watching George’s face for any sort of tell. Sapnap knows him well, but George keeps forgetting that.

Of course, he knows when something is wrong.

George almost tells them, about Elysium and about Sam and his parents and why Sam actually has any control over him and—

It would be so easy.

“Yeah, everything’s fine,” George lies, “I owe Sam some favours, just doing programming he’s been putting off because it’s time intensive for no reason.”

Quackity nods.

Sapnap isn't convinced.

He isn't convinced of much these days, recent events have clearly affected them all in almost every way possible, but now there's something... withdrawn about the way Sapnap moves and talks.

The way he looks out for George like his life depends on it because he's failed at looking out for his friends before and now they're all dealing with the outfall of that.

"I'm okay," George says again, trying to remove some of the doubt in Sapnap's eyes, it's not even a lie. "Do we wanna go to Quackity's for Japanese tonight?"

"For sure," Quackity says with a smile.

George nods, before turning around and walking away.

He can feel Sapnap's uncertainty as George leaves.

The walk to Sam's office feels like George is in high school again, and he's being questioned by the principal. George drags his feet the entire way. He's not happy about this entire thing and—

He gets to Sam's office, near the workshop, and pushes open the door.

Sam is sitting at his desk, squinting at a tablet that's propped up with a bunch of papers around him, George knows that's calculus surrounding him, and if George was slightly more bothered he'd solve them instead of focusing on the anxiety that's eating him up.

George sits down.

Sam looks up, “What’s four plus seven?”

“Eleven?”

How stupid is this man?

Worst of all George appears to be being blackmailed by a *stupid* man.

“Thanks,” Sam mutters, before looking up again, “What’s going on between Quackity and Sapnap?”

Okay.

Cool, George is *not* telling Sam that.

“They have a crush on each other,” George lies smoothly, shocking himself at how quickly this lie came to him, “Neither of them are doing anything about it because of the rules.”

Sam nods, looking back down. “George, do you know how much blue it takes to kill someone?”

That is a conversation shift if George’s ever heard one.

“What?” George half-laughs to try and remove some of the awkwardness, “No— that’s not exactly taught at the school I went to.”

“About five and a half drams,” Sam says, “Or about twenty millilitres. Of pure blue, it only takes that much, twenty millilitres can fit in standard-sized needles, and that amount causes your body to release a lethal amount of hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol.”

George blinks at him.

“And your heart might explode, from beating too fast,” Sam adds helpfully, “It isn’t a guaranteed death but the statistics are pretty high. Ten millilitres will make someone pass out from their brain being overwhelmed due to mixed messages and adrenaline.”

“Okay...” George says slowly. “What does this have anything to do with me—”

“I want fifty millilitres of blue.”

“What?” George says, “The fuck— I don’t know how to fucking do that—”

Sam raises an eyebrow, “You can figure it out.”

“You get it!” George snaps, “The fuck? Listen to my accent does it look like I could just walk into Logstedchire and find blue? Surely you can synthesise it here or something—”

“Elysium took the chemical formula.”

George stares at him for a few moments, mouth open, “And you *didn’t* have it backed up on a server— written down somewhere else, Elysium were able to just walk in and grab it and leave without any fuss. You didn’t have it memorised or—”

Sam just frowns.

Oh.

This man is genuinely an idiot.

Somehow this man, the one in the running to replace William Nelson-Jones, is an actual, genuine idiot.

Oh. Ender.

George crosses his arms, glaring at Sam.

“You’re going to do it.”

Then George remembers he has... no leverage.

He has very little leverage.

George sighs, putting his hands in his pockets and looking at Sam.

“You’re— gonna kill someone with it?” George asks, and he stands up, “No, nope— I am not helping you kill someone, arrest me, tell the higher-ups, I don’t care, I am not aiding you in murder.”

Sam sighs, leaning back in his chair, “I really hoped you wouldn’t say that George.”

George looks down at his feet, is he really going to help Sam murder someone?

Kill them in cold blood?

“Don’t pretend to be righteous, George,” Sam says easily, and this makes George look up. “You want this person gone as much as I do.”

George’s face screws up, he can’t think of anyone he wants *dead* . “Who would you use it on?”

Sam is silent for a few moments, before meeting George’s eyes.

He stands up, something serious and deadly in his eyes.

“Theseus.” Sam says.

Overall, Tommy’s been having a good time.

It’s a bit hot outside, due to it being Summer, he’s walked from the subway and has his headphones in and a water bottle in his hand. He has Twitter on his phone, and is living his best life.

In front of him stands Wilbur Soot.

Wilbur is also walking towards him, his car a little bit behind him.

For some reason he’s wearing an undone red flannel and a black t-shirt underneath and sunglasses. He looks like a bad lumberjack, with even worse sunglasses.

What is Tommy going to be saying after two weeks of not talking to anyone at the hero tower?

Especially who Wilbur who tends to worry about him a lot and—

“Your sunglasses are ugly.”

That is the first thing Tommy calls out to Wilbur, after two weeks of no contact.

“And you look like a fuckin’ lumberjack,” Tommy continues.

They both stop in front of path that leads up to Phil’s house.

Wilbur raises an eyebrow, crossing his arms.

“Hello to you too. And my eyes are sensitive to light, *Tommy* .”

“Blue eyes are more sensitive genetically, but you don’t see me being a little bitch about it. *And* I don’t look like a lumberjack, *Wilbur*.”

They walk up so they’re on the porch of Phil’s house.

Tomm has his gifts tucked under his arm.

Wilbur hesitates, hand hovering over the door going to open it.

Instead, he turns to look at Tommy with a grin on his face.

“I might look like a lumberjack but I look like a *cool* lumberjack.”

“No, not even,” Tommy says. “Gonna go chop some lumber?”

“The fuck does that even mean?”

“You could not pick up an axe if your fuckin’ life depended on it, your weak little arms would snap off.”

Wilbur stares at him, “You done Twig-Arms Underscore?”

Tommy glares at him, and Wilbur swings the door open.

Tommy manages to knock Wilbur out of the way, and walks into the house before Wilbur can, mostly because he’s an annoying little brother and the world needs to know about it.

It works, because Wilbur sighs under his breath as Tommy darts in front of him.

“Y’know I haven’t seen you in two weeks and the first thing you do is make fun of what I’m wearing.”

“You just make it so easy,” Tommy deadpans, he holds the gifts a little bit closer to him as he walks towards the kitchen, Wilbur following behind after him, and Tommy knows Wilbur is unimpressed with the entire situation. “I had a mental breakdown and Techno put me on leave for two and a half weeks.”

Tommy turns around to look at Wilbur.

“Is that what you wanted?”

“Are you alright?” Wilbur asks, “I mean— Techno put you on leave are you... okay?”

Tommy pauses for about three seconds.

His eyes dart back down to the cast on Wilbur’s wrist.

Tommy nods, “Just a rough period I guess—”

“Tommy!” Someone says brightly, and Tommy turns around.

Niki is running towards him, which is surprisingly terrifying, and she wraps his arms around him and drags him into a Niki-hug.

(Which are probably the best hugs, in his not-at-all biased opinion.)

She hugs him for a few moments, before letting go of him.

Then she looks at Wilbur, “I did not invite you.”

“I didn’t invite myself either,” Wilbur mutters darkly, “Techno said and I quote—” he looks down at his phone, scrolling for a few moments before sighing. “He said, and I quote, *‘Wilbur Soot if you don’t come to this party I will fillet you like a fucking fish.’* And Techno’s alright with a knife.”

Niki stares at him, “He threatened to fillet you?”

“Not the first time,” Wilbur says, “He gets overwhelmed at parties, he pretends he doesn’t and just threatens me into coming to them. Also stressed because he wants you to have a good time and—”

Niki pauses, “Is there food?”

“Yeah, I think there’s pizza?”

“Is there alcohol?”

Wilbur pauses for a moment, “... yes.”

Tommy sighs. Of course there is.

“It’ll be fine,” Niki says waving her hand dismissively, “Do you have Mario Kart?”

“Yeah,” Wilbur says, “It’s on the— uh— thingamabob. The— thing, the— you get what I mean.” He sighs. “Oh, yeah, happy birthday— great job on making it this far.”

“Wilbur, you don’t like me,” Niki says, arms crossed, “You don’t have to do whatever pretence thing you do—”

“You’re the one who actively dislikes me, Niki, you’re just my younger brother’s best friend. Have this.” He hands over a small wrapped package and Niki just raises an eyebrow at him.

She doesn’t reach to grab it.

“Niki...” Wilbur says, “It’ll piss off Techno.”

Niki grabs it straight away, snatching it out of Wilbur's hand and unwrapping it.

She gasps when she sees it, looking up at Wilbur, amusement in her eyes. "This is a— dog-sized Blade costume."

Wilbur grins, "You fuckin' bet it is. Okay— I said I'd go talk to Phil so—" he steps to the side, "Happy birthday, being twenty doesn't suck as much as you think it will. Take care of yourself."

He pauses for a few seconds, hesitating.

Wilbur takes a step away and then steps back, shoving his hands in his jeans pockets and looking down at the floor.

"And uh, Niki, I know you don't like me a lot but... thanks for looking out for Techno, for being his friend and supporting him and— yeah, just... thanks."

They both look at each other for a moment, then Wilbur walks past Niki and Tommy silently.

Niki watches him for a moment, her eyes narrow slightly, and Tommy can almost feel her thinking. She hums, "Huh."

"What?" Tommy asks.

"He cares about Techno."

"Fucking duh?" Tommy says, "The fuck are you on about?"

“I know that logically, just... I haven’t had a lot to do with Wilbur. He really cares.”

“Of fucking course he does.”

Niki sighs, before turning around to look at Tommy. “How have you been?”

“Good, good—” Tommy says.

Niki raises an eyebrow at him.

“Okay, probably less than good. I’m working on doing better, I guess... I want to work on that.”

Niki smiles, “That’s good, how is— seeing everyone?”

“Wilbur hasn’t asked a question, I think Techno is late... Phil is pretty good at not giving a shit about me.”

“Phil cares about you,” Niki says, glancing over her shoulder, “You’re in like two photos on his wall. He’s probably just bad at showing it, and he’s very good at not pushing people, even when he should.”

“You know a lot about Phil,” Tommy says, eyes narrowed.

“Techno is my best friend,” Niki deadpans, “You learn a lot about someone’s family when you’re friends with them. You didn’t answer the question though, how is seeing everyone?”

Tommy sighs, looking down at the floor then up at Niki. “Good. It’s good, I missed Wil, haven’t seen Phil. Uh— I talked to Tubbo! We had a falling out a while ago and we figured

that out and yeah,” he gives a small smile.

Niki breaks out into a smile, “Tommy that’s amazing!”

“Eh,” Tommy shrugs, “Nice to talk to him again.”

Niki gives a soft smile.

“Oh, birthday!” Tommy says intelligently, “Sorry that I’m a bit late, getting out of Logstedchire is a nightmare. Uh— I got you these!”

Tommy shoves everything into Niki’s arms.

One present wrapped up and... one slightly squashed bouquet.

“Uh— sorry about the flower.”

Niki brightens up completely. “Aww, Tommy! These are beautiful!”

“Thanks! I have no idea what it is!” Tommy adds just about as brightly, “I just said I was giving flowers to a mate and they got me— that.”

Niki smiles, picking up the flower carefully, trying to smooth out the petals. “I think... don’t quote me on this, that’s a red zinnia. They’re one of the nicer flowers for bouquets, they sold them at the shop I worked at.”

“You worked at a florist?”

“For a couple months yeah,” Niki replies, eyes on the flower, she tries to uncrumple the folded up petals, to very little success. She moves to the side, placing the flower down, before grabbing the squishy package.

She looks at Tommy, then smiles brightly, “I wonder what this might be.”

She unwraps the present with ferocity, tearing the paper off and crumpling it into a ball, before throwing it behind her and it bounces on the ground.

In her arms is a blue lump of fabric that needs to be unfolded.

“Uh, you were wiping your hands on your pants when we were baking, you might have an apron but I thought the little rainbow apron was too cute to lose.”

“Tommy, that’s so thoughtful, thank you so much—”

Niki unfolds it, and it falls to the right size. It’s a blue apron with a rather large pocket, with a little embroidered rainbow slightly underneath the neckline and to the side. She smiles at it, then looks at Tommy.

“Aww, Tommy—”

There’s a crash and a shuffling noise.

Both of them look, Tommy completely turning around.

It’s Techno.

Techno who is struggling with a pile of boxes that are stacked up incredibly high. Tommy almost goes over to help, then he realises that he's a little brother and it's against his moral code to help Techno with... literally anything.

“Sorry that I’m late,” Techno says, kicking one of the boxes across the floor. “Uh— traffic, yeah, traffic was crazy.”

“You can’t drive...” Niki says slowly.

Techno pauses, eyes going wider as if he had not considered this. “Yeah, traffic was wild. Uh —”

Niki takes a few careful steps forwards, squinting slightly. “Are those... are those all for me? Techno what the fuck—”

Techno manages to peer over the top of the boxes. “Oh, no, these are all empty. I just wrapped them for a dramatic entrance. I couldn’t think of what to get you— and then, well...”

He drops the boxes.

Tommy is starting to realise where Wilbur gets his dramatic flair from. Or... if Techno got his dramatic flair from Wilbur. Maybe all of them are incredibly dramatic all the time.

And peeking out from behind Techno—

Is Aimsey.

Aimsey the person from in front of the mural.

Why the fuck does Niki know Aimsey who was in front of the mural?

“You’re just too hard to buy for,” Techno says with a sigh, “So... I got you a child, this one’s a bit loud, but you tend to be attached to loud ones.”

Aimsey and Niki just stare at each other for a few moments, and Tommy takes a few steps back so he’s out of the way.

Niki puts a hand over her mouth, before looking at Techno. “What?” She whispers, there are tears in her eyes as she stares at Aimsey.

Tommy has been confused before.

But this— this takes the cake of his confusion.

“Well, Aimsey isn’t supposed to leave the premises, but they can with someone supervising, or to visit family. We couldn’t spin that you were family, but apparently I am a responsible supervisor. So now he’s here.”

Aimsey gives the smallest wave, “Techno’s the security.”

“Weakest security I know,” Niki whispers.

Without a moment of hesitation, Aimsey runs at Niki, throwing their arms around her and hugging her tightly.

Niki has no reservations and hugs Aimsey back.

Tommy glances at Techno, then back at the two hugging.

The fuck—

And then Techno's moving across the room, towards him.

Tommy takes a few stumbling steps backwards as he fully plans to run out of the room into another country, this will not go well—

“Are you okay?” Niki asks, “Have you been eating enough? Having enough water— are you safe? Do we need to get you out of L'Manberg?”

“I'm okay, I'm okay, Niki, I'm okay.”

Techno grabs Tommy by the arm.

Tommy tries to shake Techno's grip off his arm, he doesn't succeed, of course he doesn't.

“We should let them talk, and I need to talk to you.”

“I don't think you do,” Tommy grits out as Techno keeps his grip on Tommy's arm. “Let go ___”

Techno manages to drag him out of the kitchen and towards the stairs.

“I said let go,” Tommy snaps, “I swear to Prime I'll fuckin' fry you.”

Techno does not let go, and drags Tommy up the stairs.

Tommy can't do much about it because of Techno's super strength and he can do even less about it because he doesn't have powers, so he can't even zap Techno or do anything, he just has to be dragged up the stairs.

It's weird being helpless like this, Tommy hasn't been that helpless since he was a kid. Not since his parents would drag him places and Tommy couldn't do anything about it. It's weird... to hold no power again.

Techno swings a door open.

Then they're in what seems like Techno's childhood bedroom.

It's clearly a more stripped room than Wilbur, with the decorations having been taken down. But despite that there's still a photo on the bedside table of what looks like Wilbur, Techno and Phil.

The room itself is pretty simple, it's smaller than Wilbur's, but it has a massive desk and bookshelf, and a smaller wardrobe than Wilbur. The walls are white, with one black accent wall behind Techno's bed and several large windows.

The double bed is pushed into the corner with a bedside table next to it.

Tommy snorts looking around the room, "This is where you grew up?"

Techno glares, "I really think we have better things to talk about. But no, I didn't technically live here, I just had a room."

"Just?" Tommy asks, snorting slightly, "Guessing you spent all your time here and just had an apartment in Logstedchire..." he walks up to the bedside table and pick up the photo.

Sure enough, it is Phil, Wilbur and Techno. Techno is frowning as Wilbur hugs him around the shoulders and Phil is mid-laugh.

“How old are you here?”

“Nineteen,” Techno says, grabbing the photo from Tommy and putting it back on the bedside table.

“When did you move out?”

“Before that.”

“So you came back and put the photo back?” Tommy asks, “Awww, Techno.”

“Tommy.” Techno snaps, and Tommy stands up a little bit straighter. “Fucking... two weeks without contact? What the fuck?”

“You see,” Tommy says carefully, taking a few steps backwards towards the door, “I did what the kids would call a sad boy arc, I know you’re old and don’t know what that means but—”

Techno just stares at him.

“Just uh... sorta, yeah, y’know?”

“I do not.”

Tommy sighs, “I think I had a depressive episode or moment, I’m not a doctor— that doesn’t mean anything, I’m fine, most people have those at least once in their life. I just... had no motivation to do anything and... I dunno, was stuck in my head.”

Techno stares at him for a few moments.

Tommy gives a shrug, “I mean, I’m not a doctor I dunno if that’s right and— and uh, yeah. It wasn’t fun, would not recommend that for anything. And I just... barely had the energy to breathe let alone message people and—”

Techno grabs Tommy.

For a moment Tommy’s about to start fighting, to start yelling and kicking and anything. It’s the thing in the back of his brain which is a habit, to start fighting when grabbed and—

Techno hugs him.

Tommy freezes, just for a moment, before relaxing into the hug.

It’s warm, and feels safe, Tommy doesn’t feel safe a lot, but there’s something about Techno’s hugs make him feel safe even at the worst of times.

Tommy buries his face in Techno’s shoulder.

“I’m just glad you’re alright,” Techno says, hugging Tommy tight. “I was worried about you.”

Tommy doesn’t say anything, just relaxing into the hug, and letting it happen.

He deserves it.

Sometimes Tommy just needs a hug, and he's not going to deny himself comfort when he needs it anymore, so he sighs and lets Techno hug him, hugging Techno back as hard as he can.

It's nice.

It's just... nice.

Eventually, Techno lets go of him, holding him by the shoulders.

"I care about you," Techno says, grabbing slightly shaking Tommy by the shoulders, "Alright?"

"Can you not— care about me?"

"Nope. I care about you."

"I know..."

"You still need to be reminded sometimes," Techno says, still holding Tommy by the shoulders, "Alright? I care about you a lot, and— yeah. Bad with emotions, but you gotta know this."

Tommy nods slowly, "I care about you too."

"I know, and I don't doubt that."

Tommy grabs Techno's wrist and takes Techno's hand off of his shoulder.

He turns around and busying himself with looking at the bookshelf, back to Techno.

“How’s... things at the tower?”

“Well, you’re a very wanted criminal. Most of the heroes know that I know you, the committee doesn’t know shit. They’re talking about security upgrades and... Slimecicle is back.”

Tommy stops completely, turning to look at Techno. “Slime was with Elysium.”

“Slime still might be, he’s been seen on patrol... people think Theseus is dead.”

“It’s been two weeks.”

“That’s the longest gap you’ve had in years.”

Tommy pauses, looking at the bookshelf and running his hand across the books. It’s a pretty empty bookshelf, Tommy knows Techno would’ve taken basically everything with him. Tommy’s actually shocked he didn’t take the bookshelf as well.

He sighs, taking off a random book. It’s a sketchbook of some kind, “You draw?”

“I did when I was a teenager, put that down. You’re avoiding the question.”

“You haven’t asked anything,” Tommy returns easily.

Tommy puts that down, before pulling out another book 'Good Omens' it's an older book, with the front cover with rips and tears in it. Tommy wouldn't doubt if this was second hand, he puts that back on the bookshelf.

"Theseus hasn't been seen in two weeks," Techno repeats, stronger this time.

"And he's not going to be seen ever again if I have anything to say about it." Tommy snaps, turning around and facing Techno. "I'm done, with Theseus."

That seems to make Techno speechless.

He just stares at Tommy, mouth open.

Tommy nods slowly, taking a deep breath.

"The country is on the verge of a coup and you're just gonna... leave whatever political mess you helped cause?"

"Exactly."

"Tommy. They're gonna think the heroes arrested you."

"No they're not."

"Tommy, I can assure you, that if anything happens to Theseus that is the easiest way to start riots all throughout the city. Even Upper L'Manberg loves you, to have you fall off the face of the Earth is dangerous."

Tommy looks down, “I can’t keep— doing this whole Theseus thing, Tech, I... I can’t take the lying and the workload and all of it, I hate who I’m becoming behind that stupid fucking mask, I hate that I’m hurting people and I don’t want to be that person anymore.”

Techno sighs.

“I’ve spent— three years taking care of everyone in Logstedchire, it was a year when I was the only active vigilante in Logstedchire. Spent three years fighting for people and letting them go free for petty crimes, Techno... three years is no short time. I need— I need a break, I needed a break three years ago. I don’t want to be Theseus, I shouldn’t have to be. I didn’t mean to cause this political mess.”

Techno crosses his arms.

“I didn’t! I don’t mean to do any of this, I never mean to do any of this— I just— wanted to do what I was right, I didn’t want to work with Elysium, but Blue was involved and— and I stop thinking or being rational when that happens. And— it didn’t mean to become this, I didn’t mean to—”

Techno sighs, sitting down on his bed and sighing, “This is a mess.”

Tommy sits down next to Techno, hunching over and looking down at the floor.

Both of them sit there in silence.

Then Tommy decides to lay on Techno’s shoulder, and Techno shuffles closer so Tommy doesn’t have to crane his neck as much. He sighs softly and Techno doesn’t say a word.

They sit there in a silence, it’s not quite comfortable, not quite uneasy but something in the middle. Tommy and Techno sit there, on the bed just... staring at the wall in front of them, neither quite sure what to say to the other.

Tommy knows Techno wants him to be Theseus.

Tommy also knows that Techno wants the best for *him* , for Tommy, not Theseus, he wants the best for Tommy, and... Tommy thinks this is the best for him, to quit, and if Techno doesn't understand that—

Then Tommy can't do anything to change his mind.

“You want the best for me?”

Techno nods.

“This is the best fo me.”

Techno is quiet for a few more moments, “I know. I know that this is and I hate that I know it is.”

“Do you want me to keep being Theseus?”

“I want a Theseus,” Techno continues, “Not you— but then that takes away from what makes Theseus, Theseus and— it's so fucking complicated.”

“I can keep being—”

“No,” Techno screws up his face, “Don't do something that's actively harming your mental health because I want the idea of a Theseus, someone who represents Logstedchire, that's dumb as fuck.”

“Okay...”

“Take care of yourself,” Techno says, “Alright?”

Tommy huffs, “Fineeee.”

Another moment of silence, it doesn’t feel quite comfortable not quite uncomfortable, it’s something that’s not quite either.

There’s a noise from outside and Techno sighs.

“I have a party to attend to,” Techno sighs, “There’s a cake that needs to be organised.”

“Do you have to leave?” Tommy asks.

“Tommy—”

“I just... a couple more moments? Please, I just need to calm down. I missed you and—”

Techno doesn’t say anything else.

It’s weird, being able to sit in someone else’s company and feel at home, Tommy... is still getting used to the feeling, there’s plenty of people he can sit in silence with and still feel heard. Purpled is one, Tubbo was another, and hopefully he will be one again.

But it’s nice.

Just for a moment they have no responsibilities and Tommy can sit with his brother.

“Tell me something dumb,” Techno says.

“Kung Fu Panda edits slap.”

“Well that’s not dumb, that’s just a fact.”

Tommy snorts, “You can’t put metal in the microwave.”

“Tommy…”

“Shut up.”

“Tommy…”

“Look. No one told me that.”

“It’s common sense?”

“It’s not,” Tommy argues, “Why would metal react to it?”

“Electrons.”

“I can’t hear you.”

Techno snorts, “Alright, Microwave man, I have a cake to organise. C’mon. Be social.”

“I hate being social.”

Techno just rolls his eyes, picking up Tommy not too dissimilar to the way someone would a toddler who’s having a tantrum and laying on the floor.

Tommy is placed on his feet and he glares at Techno.

Techno glares back at him.

“You’re like an angry cat.”

“Oh— yeah,” Tommy says, looking down at his feet. “Uh— funny story actually, really funny story. My powers don’t work anymore.”

A moment of stunned silence.

“Where’s the punchline?”

Tommy just gives Techno a smile.

“Tommy... where’s the punchline?”

Then Tommy, very maturely, sprints out of the room.

He swings the door open, before bolting down the stairs.

“Come back you little shit!” Techno yells after him, “What do you mean— oh you clever fuck.”

Tommy skids across the floor the way that a dramatic child would—

Then barrels directly into Phil.

Phil hits the ground, and Tommy stumbles backwards.

From the floor Phil stares up at him, “Hey, Tommy.”

“Hello,” Tommy offers him a hand and drags Phil onto his feet.

Phil looks... like Phil, he somehow looks more tired since Tommy saw him, the bags under his eyes are a little bit bigger and the wrinkles on his forehead are a little more creased, he’s wearing a...

Button-up-shirt with toucans on it.

And cargo shorts.

Holy shit, this man is a father.

Phil gives Tommy a tired smile, “Hello.”

“Where’s Wilbur?”

“Doing Wilbur things,” Phil says, “I think he’s talking to one of Niki’s friends—”

“He’s talking to Kristin!” Aimsey says brightly from behind him, “You are being thoroughly embarrassed right now.”

Tommy, with great glee, gets to watch the disappointed expression on Phil’s face, and he manages to watch Phil speedrun the stages of grief, perhaps invent some new ones along the way, before hitting acceptance.

“Oi!” Techno yells, and Tommy doesn’t even turn around, instead raising a hand and flipping Techno off, without even facing him. “Phil, Tommy, I need you in the kitchen. Guard the cake! Don’t let anyone in.”

“When did he put the cake in the—”

“Don’t ask,” Phil stage-whispers to Tommy.

Tommy considers this for a moment, before turning around to flip off Techno.

This time with two hands.

Techno doesn’t hesitate before doing the exact same thing.

So there they are.

Two brothers just... flipping each other off.

“Fuck you.”

“Fuck off.”

“Why are we cussing each other out?” Wilbur asks, turning a corner, he glances from Techno to Tommy. “Do I have to pick a side?”

“Yes.” Tommy says.

“No,” Techno says at the same time.

Wilbur sighs, before walking over in Techno’s direction and flipping off Tommy. “Sorry Toms, what sorta older brother would I be if I didn’t team up on the youngest. So fuck you Tommy.”

“Fuck the lotta ya,” Tommy says, huffing before walking towards the kitchen, “I hate ya all, I hope you fuckin’ bang your heads you fuckin’ clobberpot, wanker, assholes.”

“Dear Prime,” Techno mutters, “He’s gone full Logsted.”

“I’ll go full fuckin’ Logsted when I hit your head into the pavement you—”

Phil grabs him, before leading him into the kitchen.

Wilbur and Techno cackle as he’s dragged off.

Tommy gets into the kitchen, and Phil looks at him.

“It’s a little bit funny,” Tommy defends.

“Oh, it’s hilarious, I have never heard your accent that strong. Impressed that Wilbur and Techno ganging up on you is what made that happen.”

Tommy just huffs, sitting up on the bench across from the cake.

The cake is a nice one. It’s two layers, which Tommy thinks is incredibly impressive and he has no idea how Techno travelled that, or if someone made it or— what is going on there. It’s a white cake, which has... what might be sugar flowers on the top.

On the side of it, in handwriting that is clearly Techno’s it says.

‘Happy Birthday Niki’ but the ‘ay’ of the birthday is much smaller than the rest of it, which makes Tommy snort and glance at Phil who is looking through the cupboards.

“Heard Theseus has gone missing?” Phil asks.

Tommy pauses, squinting at Phil, “I mean— last couple times he was out were fuckin’ terrible for everyone involved. Make sense that he’d go under the radar, only an idiot wouldn’t.”

“Theseus doesn’t seem like the brightest.”

“He’s not,” Tommy says, “Why are we talking about Theseus? He’s been gone, problem is gone— it’s such a boring conversation topic. Yeah, it’s a boy in a mask fucking things up for everyone involved.”

Phil grabs a bag of chips and a bowl. Pouring most of the bag into the bowl then putting it on the counter between them.

“Just wanna know what you think, you liked Theseus a lot earlier on, has that changed or—”

“Yeah,” Tommy laughs out bitterly, “I— I want him gone.”

Phil’s eyes go wide, “Tommy that’s a shit thing to say— he’s your age.”

“I don’t care,” Tommy snaps, “I want Theseus gone. Locked up— missing, I don’t care I just want him gone.”

“Since when did you hate Theseus?”

“Feels like forever,” Tommy spits out. “I want him gone... not— not dead, I just want him gone. To disappear into the ground and never come back.”

Phil gives him a sad look, leaning against the counters, “It’s an awful thing to say about a kid.”

“I know you’ve said worse,” Tommy spits, “How come you and Wilbur are allowed to hate Theseus and the second I do, for similar reasons, I reckon, I get berated for it.”

A boy can’t even insult his own vigilante persona in this political climate.

Phil looks at him for a long moment, there’s something gentle in his eyes. It’s different to the gentleness that Wilbur and Techno have for him, and Tommy can’t decide if he hates it or wants nothing more than the care on Phil’s face to always be there.

“You’re better than us, kid,” Phil says easily as if he’s known these words all along. “I’m not sure if you know that or not. But you’re better than all of us have ever been, braver, smarter, probably stronger— and it hurts to see you talk like this.”

Tommy looks down at his shoes, they have a scuff mark on the edge, and part of the sole is slipping away from the toe of the shoe, but it is what it is. He'll get new shoes when the rest of it peels away.

"You seem to really hate him," Phil says, his voice is still remarkably gentle, "And—"

"Maybe I don't wanna be better," Tommy snaps, "Because it's all I keep seeming to get told, 'you're better than us,' as if that excuses your shit behaviour and means I'm not allowed to be a shit person too sometimes, newsflash, I'm not a super nice person Phil. And don't even try cut me off, I know I'm not."

"You're a teenager," Phil returns, "Most teenagers think they're some sort of greater evil when you're just a kid."

"You dunno shit about me Phil," Tommy barks back, "Don't even try—"

"No, but I've raised two legally and like three more emotionally, I'm not completely stupid when it comes to teenagers. And I know it's not the same, but I can promise you that you're not the big evil you've made yourself out to be in your head."

Tommy snorts.

If only Phil knew.

"My kids don't spend time around bad people, Tommy," Phil says, "They did once upon a time, and they are *so* careful to not make that mistake again. They spend time with people they trust— they hire people who they have a good feeling about."

Tommy just glares.

Phil sighs, “Look, I’m not saying you’re perfect. But I can assure you no matter what you’ve done, you’re not the monster you’ve decided you are. You’re a pretty standard teenager, and I’m not sure if you have pretty standard problems but—”

Tommy just crosses his arms, looking at Phil.

“You’re not the evil person who you think you are, you’re sixteen. Sixteen years olds... aren’t really evil, they don’t do homework and manipulate people sometimes to get what they want, it’s a part of brain development.”

“You’re a part of brain development,” Tommy mumbles.

“I mean, a responsible guardian figure is good for brain development.”

“You are not my responsible guardian figure, if anyone gets that title it’s Techno and— he’s also Techno.”

Phil laughs, leaning back slightly, “You’re not evil Tommy.”

“Evil is a very strong word.”

“You’re not a bad person.”

“Bad people do bad things.”

“Bad people don’t feel guilty about those things, bad people think about their actions and still go through with them. You are not a bad person Tommy, I will promise you that much. You’re just young, and you might do bad things but you’re a human.”

Tommy frowns.

“Not some larger-than-life figure, not— someone who is in charge of keeping everyone else happy. You’re a kid, alright? And I think you keep forgetting that, because you hold yourself to impossibly high standards and when you don’t reach them you fall into a depth of... self-loathing, maybe... I dunno.”

Tommy shrugs.

“Tommy, you ask of yourself things adults don’t handle alone. Our PR alone, and I know there are issues at home and I’m not going to pry into that because I know Techno and Wilbur sometimes pry too much. But— you’re handling things entire teams of people handled a few months ago.”

“It’s easy enough—”

“Tommy,” Phil says gently, “If it’s all too much, you can tell us, right?”

And Tommy almost wants to burst out crying from those words because *yes*, yes it’s all too much and it was all too much a long time ago.

He’s gotten to the point where breathing hurts. He doesn’t know how to exist outside of the identity he gave himself because he felt powerless when he was thirteen and Tubbo is back in his life. Everything is too much and he really wants to go home but he doesn’t know where home is anymore—

Tommy smiles, and he hopes it reaches his eyes, “I’m good. I have it under control, life’s been chill at the moment.”

He doesn’t really know who he is and he’s been lying for so long that it’s all going to catch up and he wants to take care of himself but he doesn’t even know how to start doing that and

he's probably the reason Techno and Wilbur are going to be tense with each other for a long time and he just...

Just doesn't know what to do.

It became all too much long ago, and he doesn't even know what to call this level of 'too-muchness'.

It feels like drowning.

It feels like drowning but just before you hit the bottom of the pool or the lake or whatever it is, you think someone will save you but no one has saved you before, so you're left with the muffled noises all around and the water going into your lungs.

But you've been drowning for so long that the water in your lungs is something that you're used to and yeah you're drowning but...

Tommy's been drowning for a while.

But nothing's happened yet.

So is he really drowning at all?

"Toms?" Phil asks.

Tommy snaps out of it, looking at Phil, "Huh, sorry, what?"

"You okay?"

“Yeah,” Tommy’s eyes dart to the door, where Wilbur is leaning against the doorway, eyes slightly narrowed as he looks at Tommy. “Oh, look, the lumberjack.”

Wilbur rolls his eyes. “This lumberjack is here to move a cake. Phil, can you give me a hand? If I drop this Techno might actually turn me into a fillet.”

Phil and Wilbur move the cake slowly, and Tommy watches them shuffle along and watches with amusement as he watches the panic every time they get even slightly close to knocking it over.

Tommy walks out into where there’s a large table set up, and everyone is standing. Niki has her eyes closed and is holding onto Techno’s shoulder.

“Did you make it?” Niki asks.

“Tech and I did it!” Aimsey says brightly, “By that I mean I bossed Techno around for like three hours before coming here, it was amazing. I would recommend. He got to do some of the icing—”

Wilbur and Phil place the cake down and slide it into the middle.

Tommy keeps back, he doesn’t... want to do any of this, not right now. He’ll sing and clap and whatever, but he doesn’t want to be in the centre of it the way that the rest of them are.

Niki opens her eyes, grinning as she sees the slightly wonky ‘Happy Birthday Niki’.

“Happy birthday to you—” everyone starts in perhaps the most monotone and helpless voice that Tommy has ever heard, the way that happy birthday is supposed to be sung.

There feels like there's something fake in the way that Tommy joins in with everyone else, singing and clapping when Niki manages to blow out all twenty candles in one go because of course she does.

They eat the cake, it's fine... Tommy's heart isn't in this anymore.

He wants to go home.

Maybe *this* is why he never went to any parties.

After the cake, everyone decides that because they're all nerds the best thing to do is play video games and eat the pizza that has been ordered, and as far as parties Tommy has been to (like three) this one is pretty good.

And while Tommy feels off, and not quite... himself he is glad for one thing.

And that is being able to demolish Aimsey in Mario Kart.

"You fuck!" Aimsey yells as Tommy demolishes everyone in Mario Kart for the fifth time in a row.

Tommy hands the controller back to Wilbur who grins at him, reaching out and ruffling his hair.

"This is why you have little brothers, everyone." Wilbur announces to the room.

"That's your brother?" Someone asks.

Someone being... someone that Tommy doesn't know, Tommy doesn't actually know most of the people here, he thinks some are from Niki's bakery, some are from field hockey, some are probably from high school or whatever...

Tommy barely knows any of these people. He knows Kristin and Aimsey, but he barely knows Aimsey and Kristin and Phil have been talking about... types of fish all night, because old people flirting is weird.

Wilbur grins, "That's him."

"Adopted." Techno adds darkly, "We are not responsible for his upbringing. He's just like that."

That gets a couple of laughs and Tommy just glares at Techno.

It's nice though, thrashing people in video games and then being able to sit next to Wilbur and whisper snide comments about other people around them, that really is the highlight of the entire thing.

Tommy hasn't done a lot of these social events before, not ones where he wasn't busy but now he's sitting here.

Oh. Boy.

He hates to be dramatic, but it is possible he is having the worst time, it feels too hot, everyone is too loud and he hates the music being played. He's second-guessing everything he's said ever and—

He is aware, that's a very standard teenage experience.

Well, he thinks so.

He hasn't had many of those to base that off of.

But he hates it.

He has decided he hates being in a room with several people he doesn't know, where he only knows like... four people. One of those is having a birthday and not overly concerned with Tommy, the other he met one time, one is Techno whose idea of social interaction is just insulting Wilbur and Tommy, and Wilbur who... is very invested in Mario Kart.

Can he leave?

He would like to leave.

Instead of doing that, he watches the TV as Wilbur loses dramatically at Mario Kart, and one of Niki's friends who Tommy doesn't know but she is sitting on the other side of Tommy, wins, trash-talking enough for everyone.

Tommy would very, very, *very* much like to leave.

Niki and him catch eyes, with Niki being on the beanbag, she looks at Tommy, tilting her head slightly.

'You okay?' She mouths.

Tommy glances to the side to make sure Wilbur isn't watching him, then back at Niki, "*No.*" He signs. He starts bouncing his leg and Niki squints at him for a moment. Tommy can't even find it within himself to sign any more than that.

Niki stands up, “I’m gonna need Tommy,” she says and grabs Tommy by the wrist, dragging him up onto his feet and dragging him out of the area.

Like Techno had only a few hours before, she drags Tommy up the stairs, but this time Tommy actually walks, rather than having to be carried.

Niki stops in the middle of the hallway, looking at Tommy with gentle eyes that she has. She pauses for a moment, tilting her head. “You alright?”

“The fuck is that?” Someone asks.

Niki cranes her head to look at the person talking to them. Tommy doesn’t even bother to look up, just staring at the wall in front of him.

“Fuck off Aster,” Niki snaps, “He’s overwhelmed, fuck right off—”

Aster sighs, with a roll of his eyes before climbing down the stairs, flipping Niki off as they go.

Niki apparently doesn’t care at all, because she sighs and looks at Tommy. “You doin’ alright?”

“I think— everything has just... hit me at once.” Tommy says blankly, “Like— holy fuck.”

“Like socially or—”

“Everything,” Tommy says quietly, “Just— everything, these last couple of months. My childhood— everything is just—”

“Alright, I think you’re overwhelmed,” Niki says, “And that’s alright.”

“I feel like Techno gets like this.”

“Techno lives in a state of being overwhelmed, it’s not good for him,” Niki says, she reaches behind her before grabbing her phone. “Pop the case on and off, it helps me focus and uh— I don’t have anything else on me.”

Tommy takes Niki’s phone.

Sure enough, he pops the case on and off.

It’s a bit calming doing that, being able to have the routine motion. “You should go downstairs, I don’t want to ruin your night.”

“You aren’t,” Niki says, “What would ruin my night is if you were having a bad time. I don’t mind sitting here for a bit, they’ll survive without me.”

“Happy twentieth,” Tommy says.

“When’s your birthday?” Niki asks.

Tommy looks back down at the phone case, “Well, the one on my birth certificate is in April... uh— my actual one is soon.”

“Soon! Oh that’s exciting, how soon?”

Tommy shrugs a little, “Uh, that’s kinda— I don’t really share that. It’s soon though... it’s the twenty-fourth right?”

Niki nods.

“Yeah. Soon,” Tommy just shrugs slightly before leaning back against the wall, looking up slightly.

He keeps on popping the case on and off and looking down at his hands as Niki just sits next to him quietly.

Niki and him are both quiet.

“Is it alright?” Tommy asks, “Being twenty? Being older— I dunno.”

“It’s nice,” Niki says, she tilts her head back and looks up at the ceiling, “Knowing who you are? Starting to figure it out... I’m only twenty I dunno a lot about... well a lot, but I’m starting to figure it out, I might not for years but... yeah.”

“The twenty-year-olds I know don’t know jackshit.”

“And I’m one of them,” Niki says, “No one really knows anything— not really, just a bunch of teenagers trying to figure it out, finding their place in the world. Sometimes that’s hard, sometimes that’s easy but— it’ll be alright.”

“Huh?”

“Everything, it’ll be alright one day,” Niki says, “The grief... the loss, everything will be okay one day. Probably not like— tomorrow, but hopefully one day you’re able to wake up and... you know you’ll be okay.”

Tommy huffs, dropping the phone between Niki and himself.

“I don’t know who I am.”

Niki glances at him for a second, “Me neither.”

“You seem like you have it together, if only slightly.”

“Prime no,” Niki laughs, “No... trust me, I do not.”

“Is it scary?” Tommy asks.

“Is what?”

“I dunno— everything, living on your own terms, anything—”

“Nah,” Niki stretches her legs out in front of her, “Well, yes, terrifying but... worth it. It’s all worth it, I think. I’ve been the happiest this year than I have most of my life— and maybe the second half of this year will be awful, but I had this good part and— that was nice. Have to let yourself enjoy the good parts.”

“You’re very wise.”

“Comes with the age.”

“You’re like three years older than me.”

Niki smiles at that, before moving so she’s fully laying on the floor, staring up at the ceiling.

Tommy finds himself laying on the floor as well.

It must look stupid for anyone who's not them, two idiots staring up at the roof, but it's quiet, the noises of the party are muffled, as are the noises of Wilbur dramatically losing at Mario Kart.

For a moment... things feel almost peaceful.

Then it starts raining.

First a little pitter patter that Tommy barely notices, but as they lay their in the silence the rain gets louder until it's slamming into the roof and the house and against the window with a lot of ferocity.

Tommy can't see any windows, but he knows the rain is heavy against them.

Niki eventually sits up, "I should probably go back down..."

"Yeah..." Tommy says quietly, "Probably smart."

Niki watches him for a few moments, "It'll be alright though kid, just— all of it. It's never as bad as it looks once you're through it."

"I guess."

Niki gets up onto her feet, "I'll save you some pizza."

“Thanks,” Tommy mumbles.

And she leaves.

And Tommy is left alone, with only the sounds of the rain to comfort him as it hits into the house, it's probably windy outside as well.

Then Tommy has what is probably a terrible idea.

He stands up, looking around for anyone around him, there's no one.

Then he walks into Techno's old room, before approaching the window.

Sure enough rain is slamming against the window, and sure enough, Techno's window opens up onto a section of roofing. Meaning Tommy can sit there and... live his best life. Enjoy the rain on his skin.

He barely hesitates as he opens the window.

Yes, there is now rain on the carpet.

Tommy finds that he doesn't care too much, and Techno probably won't either.

Being careful so he doesn't slip, he steps out through the window on the other side, before carefully closing the window and standing on the tiles. He holds onto the side of the house before lowering himself.

Now he is sitting on a roof.

It buckets down around him, and Tommy can't help but be reminded of when Wilbur and him sat up here for Fundy's party— ah.

Yup. Tommy is going to ignore that and try not to think about Fundy.

It's quiet up here, Tommy can almost think.

He also knows he's cold, with both the wind and the rain and he doesn't care too much. Just hugs his arms closer to him.

Honestly, he has no clue how long he's up here for, his phone is on the inside of his incredibly not waterproof jacket pocket and he doesn't want to get it out because of... well the rain.

He's cold but not really.

And he's comfortable out here, listening to the rain and feeling it on his skin.

He's out here for a while, that's about all that Tommy knows, but he's alone and he likes it that way.

There's a noise, and Tommy looks over.

It's Wilbur, standing on a ladder with his head peeking over the shingles to look at Tommy with a similar expression to how someone would look at a wet cat.

"Fuck off." Tommy mumbles, "I like being alone."

Wilbur pauses for a few moments, tilting his head, “True, but sometimes all of us need someone around.”

Tommy doesn’t respond, and Wilbur takes that as permission to stay.

“It’s raining,” Wilbur says softly.

Tommy looks up from his gaze on the skyline, he’s not used to seeing it from Upper L’Manberg, it looks... so much cleaner, it looks nicer, like the rough edges have been taken off and replaced with some sort of refined look.

There’s no texture in the lights that Tommy can see, they’re all the same colour and brightness and—

“Yeah,” Tommy murmurs, “It’s raining.”

Wilbur clambers onto the rooftop, arms out either side of him as he balances.

The shuffling footsteps get closer towards Tommy until Wilbur’s standing next to him. “The city looks nice.”

“Looks neat,” Tommy responds.

The rain bounces against the shingles around them.

Anyone in their right mind would go inside, but it appears that neither Wilbur nor Tommy are in their right mind.

Wilbur sits down next to him.

“How are you feeling?” Wilbur asks gently.

“How are your injuries?” Tommy returns, the bruise on Wilbur’s face has faded a lot, and his lip is still healing.

Wilbur glances down at his wrist, still in the cast, before he looks up at Tommy. “I’m good, doesn’t hurt anymore.”

Tommy nods, laying down more so he’s looking up at the sky rather than anything else. It’s completely dark out, and the rain is bucketing around them, Tommy’s clothes are stuck to his body and his hair is plastered against his head.

It can’t be his strongest look.

Wilbur, at least, brought a coat, which seems pretty rainproof, instead only his hair is stuck to his head.

He seems to notice this at the same time, “Here take my coat—”

“Already soaked,” Tommy mutters, “Keep the coat.”

Wilbur hesitates for a few seconds, before figuring that must be for the best.

They sit in silence, the rain bouncing on the roof and tumbling off the side of the roof, onto the ground. Tommy swipes some hair out of his face and looks up at Wilbur who is watching the skyline.

“Wil?” Tommy asks.

“Yeah?”

Silence.

A long moment of something that stretches between them, Tommy has no idea what to call it, whether that’s trust or something else that he doesn’t know how to put into words.

“Is it ever worth it?” Tommy asks.

Wilbur looks at him, eyes narrowed and face contorted in confusion. “Is what worth it?”

“All of it,” Tommy says.

He wants to look up at the stars but the light pollution here is awful, and rain will get in his eyes. All that meets him is the black void of space above him, devoid of any stars, only the odd satellite.

“Just— everything.” He finishes.

Wilbur looks at him for a few moments. “Always. There’s— music, and there’s...” Wilbur laughs shaking his head, “There’s just existing in your own space, figuring out who you are and laughing with friends and just living.”

Tommy pauses for a few seconds, “You do music?”

“Prime no,” Wilbur shakes his head, “Used to... got pretty good at it.”

“Why’d you stop?”

Wilbur pauses for a moment, “Uh— got depressed, is the short answer. Just... didn’t find the energy to pick up a guitar again, and I’ve never... really brought myself to pick it up again, feels like a relic of... someone I could be if that makes sense?”

“I used to be really good a chess,” Tommy murmurs, drawing his knees up to his chest as he sits up. “I did one competition and bet a seventy-year-old man and I was banned from chess competitions after that.”

“Who taught you how to play?”

“Guardian,” Tommy murmurs, “Uh... took care of me before I was emancipated. He taught me how to play chess and punch people in the throat.”

“He sounds cool.”

“He— yeah,” Tommy nods, “He was.”

Wilbur doesn’t push it, and Tommy is glad for that.

“And I just never... started playing again, I just never could y’know, it felt like it hurt too much? All of my dumb tricks were taught to me by this one person, and this one person isn’t around anymore.”

He misses Deo.

He misses Deo a lot.

“Phil has a chess board I reckon,” Wilbur says, nudging him in the shoulder with a smile.

“Techno’s pretty good at chess, I can sorta play and Phil just plays checkers with the pieces.”

Tommy shakes his head.

Wilbur seems to understand.

The rain buckets around them, but Tommy barely notices the cold on his skin.

“You should try guitar again,” Tommy says, “Play me a song.”

“Only on a special occasion.”

“Tomorrow is a special occasion.”

Wilbur laughs, checking his phone and getting probably a bit too much water on it, “You mean in seventeen minutes? What happens in seventeen— no sixteen minutes that is worthy of me picking up my guitar?”

Tommy hums thoughtfully, “Another day I’m alive.”

“I mean...” Wilbur grabs Tommy by the shoulder, “Could shove you off the roof.”

“At least kick me off the roof, man,” Tommy says, “I’m not *second* to Theseus, I’m also a threat!”

Wilbur just laughs, “Tommy you are about as dangerous as a duck with a sunflower.”

“Ducks can be quite vicious.”

“I don’t know about that.”

“They can!” Tommy says with a nod of his head, “Trust me! I’ve had to fight some dangerous ducks at Tnret Park, they’re dangerous I’m telling you, they want your chips, Wilbur, those are my chips!”

“You mean fries?”

“No. I mean *chips* .”

“You’re so weird,” Wilbur murmurs under his breath, and Tommy frowns at him.

“Play a song for me,” Tommy says, poking Wilbur in the arm. “I know there will be a guitar in Phil’s, probably like in your old room or something.”

Wilbur frowns, “What song would you want?”

“You’re gonna play for me?”

“Hypothetically,” Wilbur corrects calmly, “Hypothetically would you want to hear?”

“Dunno,” Tommy says, he pauses, “Something you wrote... maybe? I dunno, anything, I guess. Just— something that feels like you, whatever you want to be. Not what Phil thinks you are or what Techno wants you to be... just something that you are, a song that is you.”

Wilbur looks at him, mouth open. “Why are you a wise, young child?”

Tommy smiles, “Somebody has to be, with all my big, big man plans.”

“Oh yeah, and what are these plans?” Wilbur asks, leaning back against the roof so he’s laying down, looking up.

Tommy pauses. “Maybe film...” he trails off, “I dunno, it’s dumb. I just want to— create y’know? I want to make something out of nothing and I want to create art, it can be shitty art, but I want to create.”

Another moment of silence.

Wilbur smiles softly, leaning towards Tommy and nudging his shoulder, “Last time I asked you, you didn’t have an answer.”

“Huh?” Tommy says.

“Last time I asked you about your future plans... you didn’t have any,” Wilbur continues with a small smile, “You have one now.”

Tommy laughs, shaking his head, “It’s an idea, not a plan.”

Wilbur shrugs, “You have something.”

“I don’t think I will anyway, university— film school especially would cost too much.”

“I can help out.”

“Wilbur,” Tommy gives him a look, “Be for real, that’s way too much money.”

Wilbur just looks at him for a long moment, “Tommy I am the biggest trust fund baby who has ever trust funded, me paying for your education would barely make a dent and I could buy like— an absurd amount of yachts.”

Tommy looks at him, “Since when did you become fucking self-aware?”

Wilbur sighs, “Yeah working on it,” he pauses for a moment, “Tommy it’s really not too much if you need help for university, I can help out, easily, even just on my hero’s wage. Call it... your inheritance.”

“Inheritance?”

“Yeah!” Wilbur says brightly, “Your grandma’s, cousin’s, daughter’s, best friend died and suddenly you have a bunch of money... looks like you can go to film school now...” Wilbur pauses for a few moments, “If you want to, of course.”

“But I don’t wanna leave you, and Techno and Phil...” Tommy mumbles, “Think you’d fall apart without me.”

Wilbur seems to consider this for a moment, a comfortable silence falling around them. The trees rustle around them and Tommy thinks he can hear cicadas in the distance.

“Staying means nothing if you can’t leave,” Wilbur says gently.

Tommy lets the words absorb into him, he thinks about them for a moment before looking at Wilbur for a few more moments, eyes narrowed slightly.

Huh.

“If you want to go to uni, or CNL or— wherever, you can go. None of us is going to stop you, and if we do— then you should punch us. You’re allowed to stop working for SBI Tommy, especially if you’re not happy doing it.”

Tommy hugs his legs up to his chest. “I’m happy.”

Wilbur looks at him for a long moment, and it feels like Wilbur just... *sees* him, he’s not used to Wilbur being able to do that. To almost see through Tommy and everything inside his soul.

“You don’t seem happy,” Wilbur says.

And oh, if that doesn’t hit the nail on the head.

Tommy pauses, “I’m not... *not* happy.”

“You’re not happy either,” Wilbur continues, “Being not, not happy isn’t the same. You just seem... you seem depressed Tommy.”

Tommy just looks up at him, “I’m tired. That’s all.”

Wilbur looks at him for a long moment, “I said that for a long time too,” Wilbur adds absentmindedly, “About three years, I kept telling everyone I was just tired, low energy, that I’d bounce back. I didn’t bounce back Tommy, instead—” Wilbur cuts himself off. “I am not trauma dumping on a sixteen-year-old.”

Tommy manages a smile at that. “You can tell me about your deepest fears in alphabetical order.”

“Anteaters,” Wilbur says, “Uh... small spaces. Really small dogs... Floof.”

“Do you know your alphabet?”

Wilbur pauses, seemingly thinking about this. “Nope!”

Tommy rolls his eyes, “Is it my go?”

“Sure.”

“Uh...” Tommy hums, “Heights. That’s it.”

“You’re *only* scared of heights?” Wilbur asks, laughing a little. “Nothing else.”

“Nope. Not a single thing,” Tommy lies, “Being abandoned, no big deal. Hospitals? I cope *super* well with those.”

“You don’t like hospitals?” Wilbur asks.

Tommy gives him a look, “I’d end up in one every time my parents beat the shit outta me,” Tommy deadpans, “Don’t really... associate anything non-traumatic with them.”

Wilbur stares at him, “I—”

“Come up with a response,” Tommy grins.

“The fuck am I supposed to say to that?”

“Skill issue?”

Wilbur throws his head back and laughs, pushing Tommy playfully, “You’re dumb.”

“ *You’re* dumb.”

“You’re even dumber than dumb, you’re the most dumb person to ever dumb.”

“Most dumb isn’t a word,” Tommy returns, nudging Wilbur’s shoulder with his own and Wilbur just rolls his eyes, nudging him back, “The correct phrasing would be *dumbest* .”

“I’m getting grammar lessons from a teenager.”

“One of us finished high school.”

“I— technically graduated.”

“You probably don’t even know how to do long division.”

“No one fucking knows how to do long division,” Wilbur says, before laying backwards on the roof, which seems a bit dumb considering how slippery the roof is. “Seriously, just use a calculator, everyone always has their phones on them.”

“But it’s a flex to say you can do long division.”

“Is it?”

“It is!”

Wilbur just huffs, before glancing at Tommy. “You’re important to me.”

Tommy glances at him, meeting his eyes. “Okay?”

“I think you need to hear it, you’re important to me, and I’m glad you’re in my life.. And it’s all worth it, this whole life thing,” Wilbur says, “For so long I thought it wasn’t but— it is.”

“Doesn’t feel like it.”

“It is,” Wilbur says again and the look on his face is... one Tommy doesn’t think he could describe even if he wanted to, it’s just... gentle and caring while being sure of itself and Tommy doesn’t want to do anything that means Wilbur won’t look at him with the same care he is right now.

“Alright? Trust me, I’m an old, wise man.”

“You’re not that old.”

“I’m twenty-five.” Wilbur deadpans.

“That’s not really that old,” Tommy says gently.

Wilbur rolls his eyes, looking out across the darkened city in front of them, “How do we keep ending up on rooftops talking at Phil’s house? If I had a dollar—”

Tommy just side-eyes Wilbur.

“Alright, alright,” Wilbur laughs.

A moment of silence.

And Tommy doesn’t know when the silence started getting comfortable with Wilbur, he’s not sure when the silence didn’t have to be filled with endless chatter to be worth something, and the silence around them is… nice.

The silence is nice.

A few moments pass.

“I have something for you,” Wilbur says quietly.

Tommy looks at him, screwing up his nose. “Huh?”

Wilbur hesitates for a moment, before reaching into his coat pocket and bringing out a box. “We all have one… Phil, Techno and I,” Wilbur says, “And— I asked Phil about it, and then I asked Techno about it.”

“Huh?” Tommy says again, “What do you actually mean?”

Wilbur sighs, “I have a brooch thing with an emerald on it, Techno has a necklace, we both wore them to the gala. Phil has like an earring because something about avians and stuff… and we thought we could get you one.”

Tommy just stares at him, mouth open.

“Techno said I could have the honours of giving you the SBI bracelet and— finally telling you what SBI stands for.”

“You mean it doesn’t stand for Salty Bitches Incorporated?”

Wilbur just laughs, rolling his eyes, “No, it stands for... Sleepy Bois Incorporated.”

Tommy blinks at him, “Salty Bitches Incorporated is much funnier. And much more accurate, why are you all— why are you all sleep deprived?”

Wilbur laughs, “It was our first proper mission together as a team, Phil was in charge, I was still a trainee in my final stages, and Techno was about halfway through, so they figured we were fine to send out. They sent us out on a stakeout.”

Tommy smiles, he can see the memory in his head. Those images of Wilbur and Techno from when they were younger, all sitting somewhere, incredibly bored, maybe eating snacks as well.

“It ended up being a thirty-six-hour event,” Wilbur laughs, “We were exhausted— but we did it, and then the press found us and asked us about our group name because we were the first group they’d seen in a while and—”

“Let me guess? Techno responded?”

“It was Phil, actually,” Wilbur smiles and it’s so incredibly fond and wistful, “He looked the reporters in the eyes and said SBI since we’d been laughing about being the Sleepy Bois for about an hour before.”

Tommy laughs, leaning against Wilbur, “That’s so dumb.”

“We’re a dumb group of people.”

“Techno’s smart,” Tommy defends.

“Sure,” Wilbur mutters, he reaches inside his coat pocket and grabs out a small little box, which seems to be the bracelet.

The rain is still bucketing down around them, in Tommy’s eyes and hair, but for some reason, it’s almost like the rain doesn’t exist. Just the dim light of the streetlamp the street over, and the moonlight.

Wilbur presses the box into Tommy’s hand.

They look at each other for a moment, “Why now?”

“Why not?” Wilbur returns.

It seems fair enough, and Tommy puts it on his lap, managing to shield it with his body as much as he can. No rain gets on it, so Tommy thinks he’s done a pretty good job at it.

In the box, is a beaded bracelet, sure enough.

There are six beads on it, with an emerald gem in the middle that Tommy stares at. It reflects the light well.

In the middle is an emerald charm, with two red beads on either side of it. One of the beads has a chip in it, but Tommy’s not sure if he’s supposed to notice that. He runs a thumb over the chipped bead.

On one side of the emerald is a pink and purple beads, and on the other are yellow and green beads.

The rest, which takes up most of the bracelet are black completely. Although one has a little line of gold through what looks like a crack in it.

“There are five colours,” Tommy says weakly, “There’s only three— well four people including me, in SBI.”

“Look at the colours,” Wilbur laughs, “Try to figure it out.”

“Well... you’re probably yellow, and Phil is green. Techno is... probably pink and I’m red. So that just leaves the purple charm.”

“Techno talked to Daniel,” Wilbur adds gently, “He’s not like— a *proper* part, he doesn’t have a bracelet or necklace or earring or a brooch, but... he’s on yours because it feels a bit like a crime to not include Daniel on your bracelet.”

Tommy smiles, eyes on the purple bead. “That’s so—”

The great thing about rain is that no one can see if Tommy cries.

And yeah.

He cries.

Over a stupid fucking bracelet, with a couple of beads that represent some of the people most important to him.

“Do you have one?” Tommy asks. “Like— with the beads?”

Wilbur nods, “Uh— well I did, I had a bracelet when I was younger. When it was just Phil and I, it was like— my adoption gift. It had a dark green bead and a dark purple one. I lost that though.”

“When?”

“Uh, warehouse collapse,” Wilbur says, “It broke off and—”

“The what?” Tommy asks, “Warehouse collapse?”

“Oh. You don’t know.”

“Don’t know what?”

“I forget you don’t know,” Wilbur says with a snort, “It really feels like everyone but me knows what happened, and everyone has thoughts about it. I just... forget not everyone knows.”

“About?” Tommy says quietly, nudging Wilbur in the side who doesn’t look away from his eyes on the skyline. “About the warehouse collapse, why is that relevant?”

Wilbur sighs, crossing his arms before glancing at Tommy. “The warehouse collapse is a nicer phrasing for my accident, which is a nicer way of saying a traumatic event.”

Tommy screws up his face, “I dunno about that, no one’s told me about that.”

“When I was fourteen,” Wilbur continues, keeping his voice mechanically even as he looks straight ahead, “Uh— somethin’ happened. Fucked me up for a bit— still kinda fucks me up if I’m being honest.”

Tommy looks at him, tilting his head. “What happened?”

Wilbur’s eyes dart to Tommy, and he pauses for a few moments, “I— I dunno, you’re a kid and it feels mean to trauma dump on a kid.”

Tommy looks at Wilbur for a few moments, giving him the most deadpanned expression in the world.

Wilbur huffs, leaning back slightly, “I dunno Tommy—”

“I was ruthlessly beaten by my parents as a child, and drug abuse was insanely common in the area I lived in and I’m pretty sure I saw someone overdose when I was five years old,” Tommy deadpans, “I can handle it.”

Wilbur looks at him, mildly horrified. “The fuck is wrong with you—”

“So, so, *so*, much,” Tommy says and Wilbur just stares at him for a few moments, “I’m not trying to push you into telling me— but if you want to, or— need to or whatever I’m listening.”

“Weird,” Wilbur mutters, “Weird telling this on my own terms— normally someone will tell someone else and be like— ‘*oh that’s why he’s like that*’ and everyone is expected to be nicer to me than they should. Like— I’m a jackass I can handle someone telling me that—”

“You’re not that bad, you’re a bit of a dick but so am I.”

Wilbur sighs, deflating slightly, “Are you— sure you wanna know?”

Tommy pauses for a moment, he... can't really think of much that would make him see Wilbur differently, if he murdered an innocent person then maybe, but he doesn't *think* that's what happened.

What happened to Wilbur sounds mildly traumatic, considering the amount of mild trauma Tommy has...

He thinks he can handle this.

"If you want to tell me, then sure," Tommy says.

Wilbur sighs.

A moment of quiet, it's not quite silence, because Tommy can almost hear Wilbur thinking next to him. He just stares straight ahead as Wilbur pauses, trying to think this entire thing through.

The rain continues around them.

"Have you ever been trapped?" Wilbur asks, and his voice is shaking, "I— don't mean like in a metaphor way, I mean very literally."

Tommy just watches him, he shakes his head.

The rain pours around them, and despite it, Tommy is so focused on Wilbur's voice the rain is just background noise as Wilbur spills his heart out to Tommy.

Wilbur nods, closing his eyes. "When I was younger— I befriended a vigilante, their name was... Eret. They went by Phobos at the time, and she was... my best friend, in the entire

world— I struggled with friends as a kid but with Eret it was just like... he understood me. I'm guessing you've had those people?"

Tommy's heart feels frozen in his throat.

"Techno and Eret worked as vigilantes together— I met Eret through Techno," Wilbur continues, voice even but Tommy can almost see through whatever performance Wilbur's trying to put up. "Uh— I dunno, she was— incredible I guess. Just really got me, and— yeah I dunno, not many people really get me."

Tommy tilts his head, "Are they... dead? You're talking about them like they died."

Wilbur barks out a laugh, shaking his head, "No— no, not dead just... gone from my life I guess. Techno might hope he's dead."

"Techno? But he's so... not violent?"

Wilbur snorts, "Wasn't always like that, kid, especially when he thought he was justified."

"Why was... Eret justified?"

A deep sigh from Wilbur that seems to weigh on his fucking bones, he glances at Tommy and glances away again, closing his eyes.

"Alright," Wilbur sighs, closing his eyes and trying to steady himself. "Do you know about— phantom hybrids?"

"Uh... they're rare because it's a mix of a Vex hybrid and a Dragonite hybrid. Both of those types are super rare already, then phantom is even rarer. Uh— phantom hybrids have wings and can phase through..."

Tommy's voice cuts itself off.

Wilbur can phase through things.

It feels like he's been winded as the realisation hits him, all the air expels from his lungs and Tommy can barely breathe as he looks at Wilbur, who just looks at him with... sad, tired eyes, that bore into his very fucking soul.

"I'm... guessing you're not a Vex hybrid?" Tommy asks breathlessly.

"No."

"You're a—"

"Phantom hybrid," Wilbur finishes, closing his eyes.

"Phantom hybrids have wings."

Wilbur opens his eyes, looking at Tommy.

He nods.

"What... what happened to you?" Tommy's breathing isn't very even, and neither is Wilbur's.

"That's— yeah. And uh— I was... fourteen maybe, and Eret asked if we could hang out." Wilbur seems to have something stuck in his throat, and there are tears in his eyes that

threaten to spill.

Tommy just watches Wilbur.

As his expression seems to break itself apart and build itself back together again, and all Tommy can do is watch as Wilbur sits there, hands fiddling with his coat sleeves.

“So... we did, as we always would and— we went to go chill in this building, an abandoned warehouse that we spent so much time in. I’d do homework— fucking hell I was so young, and—”

“Take your time,” Tommy says, and Wilbur looks up at him, “We have all the time in the world.”

Wilbur manages the weakest smile in the universe.

It’s still a smile though, no matter how small.

Wilbur takes another deep breath.

Then another.

He steadies himself.

“And— we get into the warehouse, I’m holding a fucking ice cream cone.”

“What flavour?” Tommy asks.

That manages to knock Wilbur out of his state and just stares at Tommy in shock for a few moments, “Uh— fuckin’, um. Cookies and cream. Eret had— um, chocolate with brownie mix-ins. Why is that what you focused on?”

“I like ice cream, and you needed to calm down,” Tommy says easily.

“Thank you,” Wilbur whispers, and his voice breaks a little bit.

Another moments of quiet, just filled with the noise of the rain.

“Uh— and I ate my ice cream, it was really good. And then I turn around to look at Eret... they’re... standing in front of me, with tears running down her face, and his hands are shaking...” Wilbur laughs again, and once again there’s no humour in it.

Tommy’s hands dart up to his mouth, and he covers his mouth.

“They look at me, they apologise. I’m just... paralysed with fear, benefit of their power I guess... I couldn’t move— or even think, and maybe if they weren’t looking me in the eyes I would’ve been okay.”

Tommy just watches, biting the nail on his thumb as he watches Wilbur, his leg bouncing up and down rapidly.

“Then the warehouse explodes around me, I’m thrown to the side... and things land on top of me, all around me. And— I’m trapped. I am trapped in every fucking sense of the word, I can’t— I can’t breathe—” he closes his eyes, “I can’t move and with every breath I take the concrete is pressing in on my lungs.”

“Wilbur...”

“I got thrown a knife, I don’t know— if that was mercy or a taunt from Eret, but it... it was something, I still have the knife,” Wilbur manages to laugh, but there’s no humour in it, just... fucking disgust. “Had it on my hero belt for a while. Sign of how I fucking failed.”

Tommy has his hand over his mouth, as he watches Wilbur, he doesn’t even know what to say.

People don’t prepare for these situations, and Tommy has no idea how he’s even supposed to react to this.

Instead, he just looks at Wilbur with wide eyes.

“Phantom hybrids can’t phase their wings through things until they’re about eighteen or twenty— because wings are more complicated, and— you just can’t without intense training and so... I could get myself out— easily, I just... couldn’t take all of me with me.”

“No.”

“Yeah. It was my wings or my life. I couldn’t get out, I could phase out but my wings would keep me stuck. I tried... fuck, I tried to get out, I screamed— I hit against the concrete and I screamed my fucking voice raw, I couldn’t talk and— and the concrete was pushing against me and breathing was getting harder so...”

Wilbur stops.

Tommy watches him, before standing up and sitting down on the bed next to him and looking at him, he hopes there’s a level of sincerity in his eyes and Wilbur seems to see something in his eyes.

Wilbur sighs gently, “I can’t—”

“You don’t have to,” Tommy whispers, afraid if he talks much louder he’ll break something completely. “You don’t have to say any of this Wilbur.”

Tommy hates this trust.

He hates this trust, and he knows he’s betrayed the trust Wilbur has for him a thousand times over.

With a deep breath, Wilbur shakes his head, and he must be braver than Tommy will ever be because he keeps talking. “It was either my wings or my life. And I’m sitting here in front of you.”

“Wil...”

“So I cut them off— because I couldn’t phase them through and... I barely thought about it, the consequences barely mattered because— I just wanted to live, I guess. It was that simple.”

Tommy looks at him, and he’s aware that he’s crying, but between the rain and the fact he’s pretty sure, Wilbur is crying as well.

“Just wanted to live, I was fourteen,” Wilbur stares straight ahead, and it’s harder to tell what’s tears and what’s rain, “So I got out. I— I don’t really remember the next bit, I think some civilians who risked themselves for me— I reckon they found me.”

Tommy just watches, he doesn’t know what to say, nothing can make this better. Nothing can even make this hurt slightly less, no matter what he says.

“I was pulled out of the wreckage, blood pouring from my back— I don’t reckon it was pretty and... I guess I passed out, or something, and— never saw Eret.”

“What did that— do to you?” Tommy whispers, “Losing your wings like that?”

Wilbur laughs, something bitter there, “More like what didn’t it do? Trust issues, fear of small spaces, fear of being alone or abandoned, hate the noise of explosions— and did you know, Phantom hybrids for some fuckin’ reason, fucking— brains are fucked, so serotonin is stored in your stomach, but Phantom hybrids have weird stomachs due to a fuckery of genetics so— they store some in their wings.”

Tommy stares at him.

“So I literally cut off one of my biggest supplies of serotonin and left it under a building, which— I reckon says everything you need to know about me. Uh— but yeah, the reason that Phil took me in was my wings. The reason I wasn’t immediately thrown to the foster system or some rich politician who wanted to use me as a trophy child. The reason none of that happened, were my wings and I fucking cut them off.”

“Wil...”

“Funnier part,” Wilbur continues, “So, someone drags me the last few bits, blood spurting from my back, so I go to hospital. Phantom biology is weird, basically— well the doctor’s say I’m trying to grow my wings back, and full Phantoms, back when they were around, they’d basically shut down their bodily functions— I can’t do that, since I am enough human that my life fucking sucks. Meaning my heart kept stopping because my body was trying to go into healing mode.”

Tommy stares at him, because he can’t even think of a response that makes it okay.

“The hero committee took that as a— PR stunt basically,” Wilbur mumbles, his legs hugged tightly against his chest. “Eret was a vigilante... they needed a reason to start going after vigilantes, especially after Techno who had— been a vigilante and shot at the president and gotten away with it. So— they faked my death.”

“What?” Tommy yells.

“Phantom...” Wilbur says, “Not exactly a subtle name, not exactly a subtle cover-up. One of Phil’s trainees, with wings. I hadn’t been seen much in public by then, not as a hero so— they made me, an alive kid, their fucking martyr against vigilantes.”

Tommy just stares at him.

It’s almost poetic, the whole reason Tommy is in trouble with his... vigilante-self is because of Wilbur. Almost something about a circle there, but Tommy doesn’t want to get into it right now.

“Had a funeral and whatever— you might remember it you would’ve been five or six? I dunno what you were doing at that age.”

“A lot of stuff...” Tommy says carefully, “Probably wasn’t... watching the news.”

“Yeah...” Wilbur says quietly, “That— yeah they fucking killed off Phantom, which is also me, and didn’t tell Phil or Techno that I was okay for like— three days because they wanted realistic reactions. Yes, that is a direct quote from good ol’ William Nelson-Jones.”

Tommy has no idea who that is.

He feels like that shouldn’t be the focus at the moment.

Wilbur sighs.

“Why didn’t you tell me that?” Tommy asks, “Any of this—”

“Well I wasn’t exactly gonna go *‘hey Tommy guess who’s the reason that vigilantes, one of the sole protectors of your district are super-mega-illegal now, me!’* was I?”

It's a compelling point.

"Fuck," Tommy whispers, "I'm sorry," Tommy whispers, "You didn't— you don't— you don't deserve that— any of that."

"I know," Wilbur mumbles, hugging his legs to his chest, making himself so much smaller, like he wants to fade out of existence by making himself so small. "No one does. I know that."

They stay quiet for a few moments, just the rain settles between them.

"I'm glad you did it," Tommy says, and his voice shakes.

Wilbur looks at him, pain in his eyes.

"I'm not glad— about the pain you would've went through, and— everything around that and I'm so sorry that happened. But I'm glad you're here right now, because— seems like you almost weren't."

"You're gonna make me cry," Wilbur whispers, his eyes look a bit more watery, but they've both been crying basically this entire time.

Another long moment of settling silence.

"I'm glad I'm here too," Wilbur says.

And the weight that sentence holds seems to weigh down around them, Tommy doesn't even know the full context, but he can hear how Wilbur chokes up around his words and how he drops his head, looking at the ground.

He thinks Wilbur starts proper crying at that, his shoulders heaving up and down as he sobs to himself. Clamping a hand over his mouth as he tries to muffle his cries, he shakes from the effort of trying not to cry.

For a moment Tommy doesn't know what to do, he can just watch as Wilbur tries not to cry in front of Tommy.

What would Tommy want, if the situations were reversed?

He grabs Wilbur around the shoulders, pulling him in sideways for a hug.

Wilbur freezes, before leaning into him.

"I'm glad you're here you doofus."

Tommy thinks Wilbur cries a little bit harder, and Tommy doesn't judge. Wilbur's having a moment, and from the sounds of it, it sounds like a moment that Wilbur's been waiting for, for years.

So he just hugs Wilbur, and he's glad that he's here for this moment.

When Wilbur's crying becomes a little bit quieter, and he's not shaking as much, he's still leaning against Tommy as it rains around the both of them, and Tommy doesn't even mind that much.

It's peaceful.

"Thanks," Wilbur says quietly, "Just, for everything— always."

Tommy tries to pretend that the sick feeling that's just formed in his stomach doesn't get thicker at that, he tries to pretend that he doesn't look away from Wilbur.

Wilbur trusts him.

With this— with a lot of things, and Wilbur shouldn't trust him with anything because Tommy is a fucking liar—

“Yeah,” Tommy chokes out, “Of— of course.”

“You alright?” Wilbur asks, “You look— ill.”

“Huh?” Tommy rasps out, “No— just— uh, ate something weird I reckon.”

“Do you need to go home—”

“Can't get back home anyway,” Tommy says, “Logstedchire is a nightmare to get through at night now, can't legally even be out at night—”

Wilbur looks at him for a moment, “Do you wanna stay at mine for the night? Phil has a bunch of people staying over, Techno uh— Kristin, Niki, probably more people I don't know about.”

“Aimsey,” Tommy adds weakly.

He feels like he's going to throw up.

Wilbur trusts him.

Shit.

Wilbur isn't supposed to trust him— not this much.

“Uh, if you don't want to, that's fine—”

“No, no, no,” Tommy shakes his head, “I do— just, head is in all bunch of places at the moment. That sounds— that sounds nice, really, really nice,” Tommy says.

Wilbur looks at him, before smiling, “You coming?”

“Nah... I'll stay out here for a bit,” Tommy says, “I'll be down in a second.”

Wilbur looks at him for a few moments, “Thanks,” he says, “For everything.”

And Wilbur says it easily, like it's one of the easiest things he's ever done, the way that Tommy would say hello to someone, it's said so easily, with so much trust and Tommy wants to throw up because of it.

“Yeah...” Tommy mutters, “For everything.”

Wilbur climbs down the ladder that he dragged up to the side of the building and Tommy finds himself alone.

It feels like he's really alone, a feeling in his stomach as he stares ahead.

Huh.

Okay.

He's not okay.

That's the big realisation he's come to, which might not sound shocking, but it feels groundbreaking to Tommy. That... he actually can not keep living like this, he can't keep living the way he has been.

But... things will probably get better.

He's had enough of Theseus, he's had enough of the person that he becomes when he wears the mask.

And maybe... maybe things might get a little better? He's talking to Tubbo again, and he wants to catch up with Ranboo and...

For the first time in, a long, long time, things are looking up for him.

He glances at his phone. *11:59.*

It's about to be the twenty-fifth.

The day he decided to grace the Earth with his presence almost seventeen years ago.

He looks down at his phone.

12:00

Huh...

It's his birthday.

He's actually made it, hit the big age, hit seventeen. The age that Deo threw around ten years ago, the age that Tommy genuinely didn't think he'd make it to, and now he's standing here.

He's standing here, and he's seventeen.

He did it.

Holy shit, he fucking did it.

Tommy can't say anything, he has nothing to whisper to the air, no big great secret that he needs to tell the world, nothing. He has none of that. He just has himself, the city air and the secret of his birthday.

Seventeen.

Holy Prime, that sounds weird as shit.

He's actually seventeen.

Tommy smiles to himself, looking out across the city, leaning backwards so his hands prop him up as he stares across the skyline.

He wipes at his eyes, he's not sure why, there's nothing worth crying about here.

Tommy smiles, despite it all, he smiles, barely noticeable if someone else was looking at him, but no one else was looking at him. Just a small smile, but Tommy knows that it's there.

He made it.

12:01

Well, he's had a whole successful minute of being seventeen.

Deo lied, at the end of the day he wasn't here for Tommy's seventeenth birthday. Instead, Tommy is left sitting on the edge of a building, looking over his home and wondering *how* he actually made it here.

So Thomas Underscore sits on a roof and celebrates his seventeenth birthday, anyone who used to know didn't matter anymore. It's just him and the city, the only thing that stays. The flickering lights and the cars backfiring and the endless chatter and murmuring and... it's home.

"Happy birthday to me," Tommy mutters to himself.

He stares out across the buildings, something heavy.

The city doesn't react back, he knew it wouldn't, but maybe a part of himself wanted something to change. A leaf to fly into his face, some greater sign that meant the universe cared.

He's made it.

He didn't think he would.

Tommy sighs.

Now what?

For so long he'd thought about this goal that Deo gave him when he was seven, live to seventeen, and then maybe live a bit longer after that. He sighs up at the sky, he's a bit tired, all things considered.

Tommy just stares.

He doesn't know what else he can do.

Time to get living, he supposes.

He doesn't have the weight of Theseus anymore, he can... finally worry about himself, rather than everyone else around him. He can focus on himself and his mental health— he can figure out the details of that later.

How the fuck *does* someone look after their mental health?

Do they just think a lot? Is that how self-improvement happens? With a lot of aggressive thoughts about how bad he is and trying to fix them? How the fuck does that work, why did he not learn this at school—

Something makes a noise next to him, and he sits up.

It's nothing.

Tommy sighs.

He watches the city for a few more moments.

He gets up onto his feet and climbs down off the roof.

His feet meet the grass.

Seventeen.

Weird to think about.

He sighs, looking up at the house. It sounds quieter, and Tommy is grateful for that, and slowly, but surely he treads in, the necklace Techno gave him for Swinter around his neck and the bracelet Wilbur gave him around his wrist.

It feels like belonging.

It's been a long time since Tommy's done that.

Not like this at least.

As he steps in, Techno lobs a towel at his head, which hits him in the face and Tommy staggers back a little bit.

“Oi,” Tommy picks the towel up from across his face and glares at Techno who just grins at him. “Wilbur would never do this to me.”

Wilbur pops up from behind a counter, also with a towel, “Wilbur would do that to you.”

“Techno would never talk about himself in third person,” Techno deadpans.

“I hate you both,” Tommy lies, “Genuinely, never talk to me or my kids ever again—”

“Kids?” Techno snorts, “You’d kill a plant.”

Which is true.

Tommy did accidentally kill a succulent recently.

He’s seventeen.

And one of the first interactions he’s had was Techno fucking *yeeting* a towel at him...

Hey, it wasn’t what Tommy imagined when he was seven and telling Deo that kids like him didn’t make it this far. And the voice in the back of his head says that he probably shouldn’t have made it this far.

But he’s here.

And that counts for literally everything.

No, no one knows it’s his birthday, the birthday on his fake certificate is the wrong one. The only person who actually knows is Tubbo— and Deo, but Deo’s long gone and Tubbo hasn’t had a chance to do jackshit yet.

But it's a pretty strong start to the day.

"Come on," Wilbur says, grabbing the towel off of Tommy before drying Tommy's hair, and by that Tommy means aggressively shaking his head back and forth while holding a towel.

Tommy squeals, batting Wilbur away with his hand.

"You brute!"

"Hurry up!" Wilbur snaps, "I want Maccas."

Techno squints at them, "Huh?"

"I'm sleeping over!" Tommy says brightly, grinning at Techno, "Because getting back to Logstedchire is hard and— I mean Wilbur offered me McDonald's, so I'm gonna go trash his nice apartment."

Techno nods approvingly, "He has a really nice computer."

"Stop."

"He plays so much Sims."

"It's a good game!" Wilbur throws his hands up in the air, "Look— who doesn't want to micromanage tiny video game people's lives, let me talk about my legacy challenge because I'm going so well on that."

"Do not let him talk about his legacy challenge," Phil pipes up, walking into the kitchen with an armful of plates, "Please— I've heard so much about the legacy challenge."

“I’m gonna rant, why the *fuck* haven’t they updated the previous expansion packs, it’s clear you can do more with the game now, and Get To Work is so broken and fucked— aliens? It’s a terrible addition, they need to go back and revamp it because it’s a *mess* . Like— come on, the Sims team is already playing it low with so many bugs and stuff and then they—”

Techno grabs Tommy by the arm, pulling him closer, “You should go say bye to everyone, I’ll talk to Wilbur about the Sims. He’s gonna wanna leave once he’s done.”

“Keep him talkin’,” Tommy jokes, “Uh— ask about mods or something.”

Techno gives him a lazy thumbs-up, before letting go of Tommy.

“And do not even get me started on the fact they don’t even have a generations pack yet, they give the most lacklustre, lifeless Sims we’ve historically *ever* had and they barely differ the life stages. They didn’t even have *toddlers* when the game was first released. Toddlers!”

Tommy steps out of the room, as Wilbur starts ranting about pathfinding, and he steps into the lounge room.

On the couch is Aimsey and Niki, Aimsey is leaning against Niki’s shoulder, looking up at the roof and talking, moving his hands as he talks quickly, “Then Sniff— she’s one of the recruits with me, threw a knife and I have never seen anyone with more fuckin’ accuracy than that.”

“Sniff sounds nice,” Niki adds, there’s exhaustion in her voice, and oh boy, does Tommy feel that. “When do you get your mentors?”

“Tomorrow,” Aimsey says, “I haven’t been told anyone has super interest in me, but I reckon Techno wouldn’t let me suffer, right?”

“He might not be legally allowed to take on trainees,” Niki murmurs quietly, a hand snaking up to Aimsey’s hair and running her fingers through the knots.

It’s such a domestic moment, and Tommy doesn’t really want to ruin it, but he also doesn’t really want to listen to Wilbur talk about the Sims for much longer. But there’s a certain comfortable quiet in the room.

Both Aimsey’s and Niki’s eyes dart onto Tommy, and Tommy does a small wave.

“Uh, Wil and I are heading off, and I’m being polite.”

“Teenage boy learns social cues,” Aimsey mutters absent-mindedly, leaning against Niki a little more. “More at seven.”

Tommy snorts, “Uh— so thank you for inviting me it really— really helped me figure out some stuff out and uh— you didn’t have to and uh— yeah, just thank you. Sorry I wasn’t— around a lot.”

Niki just smiles at him, something soft that crinkles the edges of her eyes, she moves.

Aimsey flops onto the couch.

She grumbles about that.

Tommy looks at Niki, giving her a smile.

She takes a few long steps towards Tommy, before grabbing him and pulling him into another Niki hug, which Tommy officially decides might be the best hugs, he huffs as he hugs him tight.

For a moment Tommy stays there, and all is right with the world.

But Niki lets go, and Tommy just looks at her, unsure of what to say for several long moments.

Niki just smiles, “Feel better?”

“A lot,” he replies in a small voice, “Thanks for inviting me.”

Niki waves a hand dismissively, “Of course, just— be safe, kid.”

“I’m always responsible and never in trouble,” Tommy adds with a grin, before shooting Niki finger guns. “Wilbur will protect me.”

Niki raises an eyebrow.

“I’m goin’ over to his,” Tommy explains, “Since Logstedchire would be a fucking nightmare to get back to and... I dunno, I deserve to do fun things, which involves annoying Wilbur.”

“You do,” Niki says carefully, “Just... don’t rely on a hero to protect you alright? Protect yourself.”

“It’s Wilbur,” Tommy argues like that means anything to Niki, and Niki frowns at that, “He’s like Techno.”

“He is not like Techno.”

Tommy frowns at Niki, narrowing his eyes a little bit, “I trust Wilbur,” he says, voice even and even he surprises himself at the lack of a shake in it. Instead, it’s strong and steady and

sure of itself. “This is a hypothetical anyway, he’d keep me safe if it came down to it.”

Niki shrugs, “Don’t rely on it.”

“Stop being a nihilist,” Aimsey says, slightly muffled by the couch.

Niki turns around, glancing at Aimsey, “That’s not what nihilist means.”

“Stop being a bore then,” Aimsey sits up, “It’s not that deep, Tommy’s goin’ to stay at his— brother figures house, I’ve stayed at yours, it’s really not that deep.”

“What time are you leaving?” Niki asks.

“Niki—” Aimsey says, “You’re motherhenning.”

“Uh... the morning?” Tommy says, “I’ll go home and— probably watch movies.”

“Alright,” Niki sighs, before reaching out and ruffling Tommy’s hair, and for once Tommy doesn’t fight away from it, and he leans into it slightly, it’s nice. “Take care kid, don’t make terrible choices.”

“I would *never* .”

“Lies,” Aimsey says from the couch, they have... a packet of chips from somewhere, and Tommy doesn’t want to think about it too hard. They shoot Tommy a smile and Tommy gives an awkward thumbs-up back.

“Thanks for havin’ me,” Tommy says easily, giving a smile, “Uh— it meant a lot. I will go now and I’m really bad at goodbyes so I’ll just say— see ya soon.”

He gets a laugh from Niki at that, and Tommy rushes out of the room.

He stands back in the kitchen.

Wilbur is... still ranting.

Techno looks actually interested, nodding and arms crossed.

“And I just think that if modders can do this, it’s offensive the Sims team haven’t hired them, hello Tommy. I did see you leave I’m not stupid—”

“You are a lil’,” Tommy says easily, leaning against the doorframe.

Wilbur huffs, “Interrupting my rants you child,” he looks at Techno who gives him an amused smirk, “Get another little brother, they said, it would be fun, they said—”

“Look,” Techno says, “After me, I’m surprised you wanted another one.”

Wilbur just glares at him, “I needed something better than you.”

“You think I’m the greatest.”

“I do not.”

“Do so,” Techno replies easily, looking down at his hands, “I’m your favourite person.”

“You are not.”

“He probably is,” Tommy pipes up, “Now, Techno’s the best— everyone loves him, can we go now?”

“Needy,” Wilbur says, but he heads towards the front door, looking at Techno before giving him a nod, “See you tomorrow?”

“Let me hug you,” Techno grumbles, grabbing Wilbur and pulling him in for a hug, it’s a short thing, and Techno lets go of him, “We’re on patrol together right?”

“Yup,” Wilbur grins, “On patrol with my little brother,” and he nudges Techno in the side with his elbow, Techno looks a bit closer to stabbing someone, probably Wilbur. “Just like old times aye?”

“Fuck off,” Techno says, “Go away.”

“Don’t say that,” Wilbur sing-songs, “Because one day I will go away, and you will be sad about it! I’ll run off to the hills, and farm— uh goats, and I will name a goat after you and he will be the bitchiest, worst goat—”

Techno sighs, rolling his eyes. “Alright, stop talking to me and go away now. I love you both.”

“Love you,” Wilbur says giving a half-hearted salute, “See ya tomorrow.”

“Don’t die.”

“Not planning on it.”

Tommy follows Wilbur out of the room, waving to Techno as he follows. Techno rolls his eyes before giving a little wave back.

Wilbur walks down the hallway, fighting to get his coat back on.

Phil and Kristin are standing in the hallway, Phil has his arms crossed and Kristin looks incredibly amused, a smile on her face as Phil talks.

Kristin rolls her eyes, but there's nothing but fondness as she does so, "I think we should have a Nerf gun battle, I would beat you easily."

"You fuckin' would not," Phil replies, "I am amazing with a gun."

"Nerf guns are different," Kristin says easily, "It's about stealth, and skill, two things I highly doubt you have."

Phil's mouth falls open.

Wilbur takes that as his cue.

"Hi, sorry to interrupt, but we're leavin'," Wilbur says, looking at Phil and Kristin.

That seems to interrupt their argument, and Phil looks over at Wilbur, closing his mouth to whatever retort that he was going to hit Kristin with.

And Kristin was then probably going to fucking roast him, as is the way that Kristin seems to roll.

“Tommy’s staying over at mine— since getting back to Logstedchire is a nightmare, then we’ll figure that out tomorrow, the child needs sleep.”

Tommy just frowns.

Wilbur grins, “Alright, see ya tomorrow?”

“It is tomorrow,” Phil says.

Wilbur huffs, rolling his eyes, “See you in the morning then *Philza* the fussiest motherfucker in the world, uh— I think someone dropped a drink in the upstairs hallway by the way.”

Tommy gets to watch, with great amusement, as the joy drains from Phil’s expression, “We have— *carpet up there.*”

Kristin rolls her eyes, “You are so incompetent, I’ll clean it up.”

“No way,” Phil replies, “I am not making you clean up the spilt drinks at my house, I’ll do it — not like I don’t know how to,” he shoots Wilbur a look at that.

“My balance is incredibly poor!” Wilbur defends, “You are aware of this.”

“I am,” Phil sighs.

“I’d do it again.”

Phil rolls his eyes, “See ya, Wil.”

“See ya!” Wilbur responds brightly, “Love you.”

“Love you too,” Phil responds, he looks at Wilbur for about two seconds more, before his eyes go back to Kristin.

Tommy snickers at that, getting a side-eye from Kristin, and he shoots Kristin a thumbs up, before following after Wilbur the few more steps down the hallway.

Wilbur swings open the door, and they’re met with rain pouring on the ground.

Then with a grin, Wilbur glances at Tommy, and Tommy looks at him back. Two boys side-eyeing each other standing on the edge of a porch.

Something almost psychic passes between them.

The knowledge that one of them will take off towards the car, the question is, which one?

And without a word, Tommy takes off towards Wilbur’s car before Wilbur can announce that they’re racing.

“You little shit!” Wilbur calls after him.

Tommy doesn’t care, because he’s winning this race as the rain pours around them, feet slamming against the ground, splashing puddles up as he runs towards Wilbur’s car. He’s vaguely aware of Wilbur chasing after him.

And Tommy shrieks with laughter as they run down the footpath, puddles splashing making most of the noise as they run.

A sleepover at Wilbur's.

What can go wrong?

As Tommy is about to find out— a real shit tonne.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter Summary:

- oh yeah. sam wants to try kill theseus (TOMMY) with blue
- Wilbur and Tommy arrive at Niki's 20th birthday at the same time. They have some banter, overall a great time. Get inside. They both give Niki her presents
- Techno shows up and is like "ALSO I BROUGHT AIMSEY" then niki cries because aimsey is okay, and then techno drags tommy upstairs and they talk about their FEELINGS AND SHIT (also tommy tells techno he can't be theseus anymore and his powers don't work)
- go downstairs, talks to phil about wanting theseus "gone" and phil is like "bro wtf"
- tommy gets overwhelmed, talks to niki for a bit before NYOOOOOM sitting on a roof, Wilbur finds him
- They talk about life, the universe and everything and Wilbur offers for Tommy to stay over at his apartment for the night because going to Logstedchire sucks.
- Basically, Wilbur was friends with a vigilante named Eret (or Phobos for any of my theorist nerds) and one day they were hanging out in a warehouse like they used to do and Eret apologised, before hitting a button and the warehouse exploded around them. Because Phantom hybrids (YEAH HE'S A PHANTOM HYBRID) can't make their wings go all ghosty Wilbur was stuck
- Because Wilbur was stuck, he cut his wings off, so he could get out of the rubble and like... live yknow? Then after that the hero committee said Phantom (that was his old hero name creative ik) died because of Eret, thus starting the crackdown on vigilantes in Logstedchire and L'Manberg in general.
- OH YEAH ALSO THE DAY AFTER NIKI'S BIRTHDAY IS TOMMY'S BIRTHDAY. he celebrates that alone on a roof shout out to that guy, he's 17 now, because he DESERVES IT!
- off de roof, says goodbye to everyone, and now he's going to wilbur's where NOTHING WILL GO WRONG

the calm before the storm :D (YES THIS IS THE CALM I KNOW HOW UNHINGED THAT SOUNDS)

school actually starts fr soon, and updates will probably be slower just because of the sheer amount of time i spend there 6AM-5PM DAYS GUYS, END ME. BUS RIDES SUCK. here i can complain about things which is fun, but yaaaaaa last year of high school fingers crossed fellas.

thanks for being here, and for reading and i hope you can all understand (at least slightly) why tina!wilbur is one of my favourites and THAT is why i'm hurting him so bad next chapter <3

In Which Wilbur Goes Snap, Crackle AND Pop

Chapter Summary

All he can do is want.

Then the world around him fades, and Wilbur tries to fight it— he really does, he tries to move or anything and—

Nothing.

Just darkness surrounds his vision.

Nothing but that and the knowledge that he probably won't wake up.

or, this chapter is my favourite so far.
things go wrong.
people get hurt.
people die.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: talks and mentions of abuse, violence, guns, blood and injury (QUITE A LOT OF IT), graphic depictions of violence and injury, fire, explosions, smoke inhalation, crushing (like being squished), medical talk, talks of death, body horror, character death, bodies

This one. Is a fucking doozy. For an explanation of how much fun I had this chapter, consider this: while writing it (both in class and in front of my girlfriend) i was like bouncing up and down in my seat and having the time of my life. So buckle up, grab yourself some snacks. This shit be wilding.

I think this is 100% my favourite tinaaos chapter by far, beating the previous favourite of chapter 33, make of that what you will

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“We should get Maccas,” Tommy says.

He puts his feet up on the dashboard and Wilbur slaps him in the legs.

Tommy just frowns at Wilbur. “This is your car.”

“Put your feet down.”

“Why?”

“I don’t want your muddy shoes all over my dash— keep your feet down.”

“I will end your bloodline.”

“That involves killing my father, put your feet down.”

Tommy... begrudgingly puts his feet down.

A moment of silence, “Why do you hate to see me succeed?”

“Why do you want to end my bloodline?”

“Sometimes sacrifices must be made.”

“You’re gonna be a sacrifice when I throw you into a burning volcano.”

“Cool story bro,” Tommy says, putting his feet back up on the dash, much to Wilbur’s seeming disgust. “Now get me a McFlurry.”

“Be nice.”

“No, I don’t think I will.”

“I will turn this car around.”

Tommy decides he’s going to call Wilbur’s bluff.

Wilbur seems to realise his bluff has been called, and he frowns, “I will get— one McFlurry.”

“I would cry.”

“Shit.”

Tommy looks at Wilbur, deciding he’s going to look like he’s on the verge of tears, which is something he can... just do now, Tommy just needs to think about a couple of things and then there are tears streaming down his face.

Wilbur glances over at him. “Don’t fucking cry.”

“I’m gonna cry.”

“I know you’re fake crying, I’ve seen you actually cry you try to hide it better.”

“I’m crying, Wilbur. You made me cry, the only way to make me stop crying is to get me a McFlurry,” he pauses for a moment, he might as well take his chances, “And chicken nuggets.”

“ *And* chicken nuggets?”

“Yup.”

“Do you want fries as well?”

“Are you offering them?”

“I figured you’re just gonna steal mine.”

Which is a good point.

Tommy wants fries as well.

“I want a thick shake too.”

“You’re getting a whole ass meal at this point!”

Tommy frowns at Wilbur, “Are you not gonna get me my fries, nuggets, McFlurry and thick shake?”

“You have to drop one.”

“No.”

“Tommy—”

“You have money flying out of your ears. Get me my Prime damn McDonald’s.”

Wilbur frowns at him, as they turn into the drive-through, he sighs slightly and he rolls his eyes at Tommy. “You’re annoyin’.”

“I’m endearing.”

“Endearingly annoying,” Wilbur sighs as they drive up to the speaker thing.

It’s relatively quiet at night, and it’s about one in the morning, which makes sense, all things considered, nothing hits quite like a late-night Maccas run.

“Hi, can I please have— two large fries, two chocolate thick shakes...” he waits a moment as that’s recited back to him, “Both large, a six piece chicken nugget box and uh— a McFlurry?”

A moment of silence.

The order is repeated back to him, and the order is right, so Wilbur drives through to the next window.

Tommy looks at Wilbur. “Why are you only getting a thick shake and fries?”

“Because... we ate a lot of pizza? I’m not hungry.”

“You are weak, and also a coward.”

Wilbur rolls his eyes, “Shut the fuck up, Tommy.”

“I will cry.”

“Shut the fuck up.”

“Crying.”

“Tommy—”

“Sobbing.”

“Thomas Underscore—”

“Throwing up, screaming, crying—”

Wilbur reaches over, slapping a hand over Tommy’s mouth.

They both look at the confused McDonald’s worker staring at them through the window.

As Tommy snickers into his hand.

The driver through worker just looks at them, and probably decides that this is far beyond their pay grade, and looks back down again, with a sigh. “Cash or card?”

“Card please,” Wilbur says, he manages to get out his credit card with one hand, which is incredibly impressive and reaches it over to the... card tappy thing that does the tappy thing and then the money does the moving thing.

Incredibly insightful, Tommy is aware.

He pays for the food, having the time of his fucking life snickering into Wilbur's hand who just shoots him looks every now and again, and Tommy laughs even harder.

Eventually, he just straight-up bites Wilbur on the hand and Wilbur draws his hand away, looking at Tommy with what appears to be mild disgust.

“I swear to Ender and also Prime and also—”

“Your order,” comes the dull voice to the right that really screams *‘I have been here for 12 hours, I didn't get a break and several child labour laws are being broken, I do not get paid enough for this shit.’* says.

Wilbur mumbles a thank you, grabbing the various things and passing the bag to Tommy, leaving him to balance the drinks and McFlurry dangerously on the little tray. He puts it down on his lap, giving Tommy his drink.

Tommy hands over the fries that are Wilbur's.

Reluctantly.

Then he starts eating his food as they roll up onto the road. Wilbur hands him the McFlurry and Tommy digs into his food.

They drive, Wilbur doesn't actually crash.

It's amazing to see actually, how he doesn't crash and end their entire lifetime, which is always ideal.

Tommy eats his food frighteningly fast, as if he didn't eat at the party, and Wilbur watches him with mild curiosity as Tommy scarfs down his food. He keeps glancing at Tommy then back on the road.

“Why are you eating so fast? We're barely out of the carpark.”

“Gotta,” Tommy says, shoving a handful of fries into his mouth, “It's the best way to eat McDonald's, can't be the *fast* food without eating it like you haven't eaten in several days.”

“You have... eaten food recently?” Wilbur asks slowly, “Right?”

“Oh, yeah,” Tommy waves his hand dismissively, “My nutrition has been amazing— the greatest. That sounds more sarcastic than I meant, it's been good. Techno and Daniel have been all pissy about it when I don't get *nutrition* . I'm good, Wil.”

“Well, someone has to worry about you.”

“I have plenty of people worrying about me,” he takes a bite of the burger and keeps speaking with his mouth full. “I got so many people worryin' abou' me all the time. It's weird.”

Wilbur glances out his rearview mirror, indicating and changing lanes as they speed along the highway. It's not really a highway and more of a main road, there aren't that many cars around, considering it is after midnight, but there's still a decent few.

“Y'know,” Tommy says thoughtfully between a handful of chips, “I've never had a real birthday.”

“Huh?”

“Well... I guess I did when I was small and with my...” his voice breaks a little, “Guardian, the one who taught me chess. But— it’s been five years since I last saw him and... I dunno, I haven’t had a proper birthday in a long time.”

“Is it your birthday?” Wilbur asks, glancing at Tommy then back at the road.

It is.

It is Tommy’s birthday, it has been for about thirty minutes now and he doesn’t know if he likes being seventeen or not, he’s not sure if he likes the way that feels on his shoulders when he thinks about it.

He is seventeen, and he really thought he’d be sixteen forever.

“No,” Tommy lies, because he is a liar, “Just the talk of Niki’s birthday and stuff, made me start thinking. Like— it’s kinda like Christmas all over again, I haven’t done all these... proper things.”

Wilbur glances at him, then at the road again.

It’s an invitation to keep talking.

And Tommy finds himself taking it.

“Like— I dunno, so much about my childhood is fractured and a fucking mess— I—” he pauses for a few moments, looking down at his hands, “I was raised in a gang. Which— fucked me up more than I give credit for. And all these things— missing out on birthdays, I had... what maybe five normal years in my life? And even those were... ruined. It’s hard to feel like a *person* when all those universal experiences are just ones you don’t have.”

Wilbur glances at him, “I’m not sure if it’ll make you feel better, but I feel the same sometimes.”

“Hmm?”

“Never had a first shitty job— well, I do but this is my first and probably last job. Never got yelled at by a customer, or a school prom or was— betrayed by having my best friend date my crush— I dunno what teenagers do. I... think I missed a lot of that too, I don’t remember my earliest birthdays, I don’t remember a lot. So, I get it, I think. Missing out.”

Tommy nods, he doesn’t think it’s a super rare thing in L’Manberg, normal childhoods are rarer than gold, but there’s still something isolating about it. Most people have that *something* they can latch onto.

“What were your parents like?” Wilbur asks. “I feel like I’ve never gotten a straight answer out of you.”

“They are the worst thing that ever happened to me,” Tommy taps his foot against the floor of the car. “But I loved them. And— in the movies when they talk about abuse it’s always bad, right?”

Wilbur tilts his head slightly, one eyebrow raised.

“And— it wasn’t *that*. I wasn’t being— beaten every day, there was... the nice moments, my mum would apologise and hug me, or my dad would take me to the park with my friends. Or — I don’t know, it was bad but it could’ve been worse. And— yeah, I was abused— this is gonna get dark.”

“I’m okay with dark.”

“Well— it never felt like enough,” Tommy whispers, “Like— it was bad, it was awful and it wasn’t my fault. But— some fucked up version of my brain figured it wasn’t enough to

justify my hate for them. And— I dunno, I know now that it was bad, and they fucked me up and it was abuse and nothing else but— a couple years ago, I dunno.”

Wilbur looks at him, “They’re dead, right?”

Tommy nods.

“How’d they die?”

“I killed them,” Tommy whispers.

It feels like a weight is lifted.

It almost feels like freedom.

There’s been this weight on Tommy since he was seven fucking years old, and it’s not gone, it’s still there, but it feels like it’s lightened slightly. He just stares ahead as he says it, and Wilbur doesn’t look surprised.

“Okay,” Wilbur says, “I am— so curious as to how a seven-year-old kills someone.”

Tommy stares down at his feet.

A mess of powers, fear for his life, tired of being in pain—

“Knock someone unconscious and they don’t tuck their heads in,” Tommy says, “Heads can crack on the floor, on a table— easy way to kill someone accidentally. I— I was scared for my life, not that it makes it better but, I dunno. That’s what happened, that’s what— I’ve been dealing with, I guess.”

Wilbur pauses for a few moments, giving Tommy a sad smile, “Shitty that you’ve dealt with that alone for so long.”

“It is.”

“I— really don’t know what to say. I’m sorry that happened to you—”

“Don’t do that shit, Wilbur,” Tommy just holds up his hand and Wilbur seems to agree because he nods to himself, “I just— wanted to talk, you don’t have to say shit. There’s not a lot you can say to that. Apart from— get good.”

“I am not responding to your trauma with ‘*get good.*’ That would be insensitive.”

“Since when have you been sensitive?”

“I am the most sensitive,” Wilbur deadpans, “And amazing with emotions, and I cry a lot.”

“The last one is true.”

“Yeah, and? There’s nothing wrong with crying a lot *Tommy* , most things are worth a good cry.”

“You’re worth a good cry.”

“I... thanks?”

“Was not a compliment.”

Wilbur checks his rearview mirror, before turning off the big fancy road and down a slightly smaller, but still fancy road. “Well, I’m choosing to take it as one, so thank you Thomas Underscore.”

“Hate you.”

“You do not.”

“I do, I just said so.”

Wilbur grins, “I just think I’m one of your favourite people.”

It is true. Probably top— five maybe? Tommy thinks ranking his favourite people is a bit biased, but Purpled is number one no matter what. Techno, Wilbur, Niki and Tubbo all fall behind him in a list of people depending on the day and who has gotten him the most shit.

Tommy shoots Wilbur back an equally big grin, “No, in fact, you are last on the list of people. The list goes... Daniel, everyone else I’ve ever met, then you.”

Wilbur just rolls his eyes, turning his indicator on and glancing at the side of the road. “Up ahead, my apartment, I think I’ll park on the side street— don’t tell anyone.”

Tommy has no intention of doing so, and the car turns so they’re at the side street.

“Your destination is on your left,” Wilbur recites, as if he is a man who has gotten directions from Google Maps too many times and his voice shows it.

Tommy snorts at Wilbur’s general bullshittery, and he swings the car door open.

The night air around him is nice, it's still raining, but it's cool on his skin. It's not windy in the more built up city areas, but Tommy enjoys the rain on his skin as Wilbur shrugs his coat back on.

Wilbur locks the car with a press of a button, and a click.

The apartment looms above them, it was a nice apartment, Tommy can see that without even entering it. It seems like the sort of place that Tommy looks at online, with a dream that one day he too would be able to afford it.

Glass windows cover large sections of the walls, with blinds drawn over some of the curtains, others emitting a faint glowing light through the curtains. Overall, the apartment is dark, most of the lights are turned off with only a few sparing sections of light getting through the window.

They approach the door to the apartment, and Wilbur taps a card on the side of the wall, the door swung open and before them is the the lobby of a very nice apartment.

The floor is clean and tiled with what appeared to be light brown, marbled floor which almost looked like sections of gold throughout the marbling. There was a large front desk— there was no one there, since it was incredibly early in the morning but Tommy didn't know people unironically had that.

Around them, the walls were a pristine white, with the sorta artwork that Tommy would expect in a hotel, large skyscrapers, lifeless landscapes in black and white, it was simple enough and Tommy stared at it.

For a nice apartment, there wasn't a lot of life in it. There was anything on the coffee tables in the lobby, the couches looked like they had never been sat on... everything was too clean and Tommy hated it, just a little bit.

Tommy knew the apartment was going to be nice, but this was another level. The floors were shiny and there were an absurd amount of houseplants around. The lobby had seats, and it seemed more like a hotel than an apartment.

Ahead there was an elevator, directly across from the door, and to the right of the elevator was a spiralling staircase, which Tommy assumed would lead up all the floors, even the stairwell was fancy.

Underneath the stairwell is a little section where there's a gap between the staircase and the floor., there were children's toys scattered around, and Tommy smiles, clearly some of the kids in this apartment use

Wilbur sighs as they both stand in the elevator.

In a pretty good indicator of how their day has gone, Wilbur doesn't hesitate and hits the button that Tommy presumes goes to his floor.

They stand there in silence.

“Uh— Tommy says, glancing at Wilbur as the elevator rumbles around them, getting higher and higher up. “Do you have somewhere for me to sleep?”

Wilbur goes quiet, “The couch?”

“Wilbur.”

“You're not taking my bed motherfucker.”

Tommy pauses for a second.

Wilbur has his keys in his hand.

Tommy will probably be taking the bed, he can guilt trip Wilbur into anything he sets his mind onto, he'll just say he'll be sad or something—

The elevator doors swing open, and Wilbur starts down a long hallway. Like most of the things in this apartment it really seems to be lifeless, with dull hotel-esque artwork on the wall as he walks down the too-perfect hallway.

Tommy follows after him, swinging his arms back and forth as he does so, glancing around. There's no dents in the wall, no chips of paint, no signs that anyone lives here apart from Wilbur and Tommy walking forwards.

Eventually they reach a door, and Wilbur fumbles for his keys, before swinging open the door.

He turns on the light, before looking at Tommy, "Welcome, to my apartment. I guess."

And the pair of them step through the door into the apartment.

Wilbur's apartment itself is a scarily accurate depiction of Wilbur himself. The kitchen is pretty small, with an island counter which has papers and a fruit bowl on it. Most of the fruit is gone from the fruit bowl, apart from a banana and an apple.

The apartment is smaller than Tommy thought it would be, it has an open kitchen and lounge room. The lounge room itself is pretty simple, with a bright orange couch and a bright yellow rug which do not match even slightly. There are two doors on either side of the lounge room, one next to the TV stand and one just behind the couch.

On the centre of the bright yellow rug there is a black coffee table covered in a plethora of paper and books.

It's clear that Wilbur wasn't expecting a guest and Tommy concludes by the way that Wilbur is staring at the mess around them, he feels bad about it. Which is bold considering the state of Tommy's apartment literally always.

There are pillows and blankets thrown over the back of the couch, with mismatching colours, and Tommy notes the way that there's a green one, a pink one and a purple one, he also notes that there are a bunch of photos around, although he doesn't want to look at any of them at the moment.

It shows life though, and Tommy finds himself walking towards the bookshelf, which is wedged in the corner of the apartment, and next to it is a large desk. It has an incredibly impressive looking PC underneath it, with all the gaming lights and stuff which helps light up that side of the apartment.

Tommy walks over to it before he can stop himself, walking over the soft yellow carpet and sitting down in the chair.

"So... how do the Sims even work?" Tommy asks, he looks at the light up PC which is incredibly impressive, Wilbur might as well spend his money on *something* why not the Sims and a ridiculously powerful computer.

Wilbur stares at him. "Don't enable me, Tommy."

Tommy just turns around, grinning, "You've been enabled, Wilbur."

Wilbur takes a deep breath, clasping his hands together. "Tommy..."

"Wilbur..."

“Okay, so the Sims is a life simulator game— basically you can have kids, get married, do challenges, get an absurd amount of expansion packs because you have way too much money and not enough hobbies.”

Tommy swivles back and forth in the chair.

Wilbur frowns at him, “If you’re not gonna take my Sims seriously—”

“I’m taking it seriously!”

Wilbur gives him a look.

Tommy shrugs. “I am being *supportive* of your endeavours.”

“I do not like you.”

“Tell me about the Sims.”

Wilbur sighs, “Alright, *Tommy* , basically you micromanage tiny people in your computer, and then you have storylines. Well, I have storylines. Currently, Addy is cheating on Johnathan with Rebecca.”

Tommy just stares at him.

“But that’s not an issue I’ll just like... lock Johnathon in a box. I could use the mods to just like fuckin’ murder him but that’s not as fun.”

Tommy stares at Wilbur, “Hey... Wilbur, my older brother, one of my favourite people, Spectre, the rival of Floof Floofikins. I say this with all the love in my heart. What the *fuck* ?”

Wilbur just stares at him. “Look, I haven’t gotten the Cow Plant involved yet.”

“The *what* ?”

“ ... the Cow Plant...” Wilbur says slowly, “Uh— it’s like, uh— eats Sims. It’s a whole thing, I lost my last heir to one, that was upsetting so I needed a new one but his skills sucked and...”

Tommy just stares at Wilbur.

Wilbur looks down at the floor. “Uh— look. We all have our coping mechanisms.”

“Yours is killing computer people?”

“It’s not that different to a writer!” Wilbur argues, crossing his arms, “But they’re masters of the craft, and I am just a deranged individual no one says this about— uh... I don’t know any authors.”

“Can you read?”

“Yes.”

“Are you sure?” Tommy deadpans, sitting down in Wilbur’s desk chair and spinning around so he’s looking at Wilbur. “Dunno man... killing Sims seems a bit odd.”

“So Shakespeare can kill two *teenagers* but I kill *one* person on purpose one time and suddenly I’m the bad guy? It’s coping!”

Tommy pauses.

“Have you considered therapy? Copious amounts of it?”

Wilbur snorts, taking off his coat and dumping it over the back of the couch, “Not sure if you’re allowed to critique me on my lack of therapy, Tommy but— yeah, I’ve been looking into it.”

“You have?”

“Don’t tell Techno... or Phil... or anyone actually—”

Tommy leans back in Wilbur’s desk chair, clasping his hands together and squinting at Wilbur. “Neither of them is going to think less of you, no one is, you’ve— well been through some shit.”

Wilbur sighs, “I tell you my trauma *one time* and then you’re on the therapy train. I don’t need you of all people worrying about me Tommy, I’m fine, really— trust me on that. But yes, I’m looking into it, and no, you’re not allowed to tell anyone.”

Tommy grins.

Wilbur must recognise the ‘little-sibling-about-to-cause-trouble’ expression because Tommy gets to watch, the mild dread come across his face. Wilbur shakes his head.

Tommy grins.

Wilbur sighs, “You’re not blackmailing me into therapy.”

“Not with that fucking attitude I’m not,” Tommy leans forwards, grinning widely.

“Tommy.”

“Wilbur.”

Wilbur just sighs, “Alright, this apartment has two bathrooms. Basically through each door is a tiny hallway which leads off into a bathroom and bedroom, and my side has a closet.”

“I’m taking your bed,” Tommy announces.

“I have a guest room!”

“You sleep in the guest room,” Tommy says, screwing up his nose, “Fuck you. Are you really gonna do this to me, your little brother?”

“Yes, I am,” Wilbur says, as he starts walking towards the door on the left. “Uh— let me find you clothes.”

A moment of shuffling in the closet to the side and Tommy just watches as Wilbur rifles around in a built-in-closet that Tommy can’t quite see.

A few moments later, Wilbur pokes his head out of the door again, holding a jumper and trackpants in his hand.

Which he then pelts at Tommy’s head, and Tommy hits the ground.

A moment of quiet.

Wilbur starts cackling, “No way that actually knocked you over,” he doubles over as Tommy scrambles to grab the jumper and trackpants that Wilbur pelted at his head. Wilbur keeps laughing and Tommy just flips him off.

“You good?” Wilbur says, “I’m going to bed— you don’t have to, don’t stay up too late.”

Tommy just gives him a look.

Wilbur grins, “Look— my life would be incomplete if I didn’t get to say that to someone at least once, you alright?”

Tommy nods.

Wilbur looks at him a final moment, “Alright... night Toms.”

“Night, love you.”

“Love you too,” and he walks into his side of the apartment, shutting the door firmly behind him.

Tommy finds himself staring at it for a few moments, before shaking his head and turning around, walking towards

The room is a simple one, there’s a bed, a backpack in the corner of the room and two bedside tables. There’s also a lamp. Not a lot of personality in the room, but Tommy expects that.

One of the bedside tables has a photo on it, Tommy’s not sure what it is with this family and photos, but they have a lot of them. Tommy picks it up, it’s an older photo, there’s dust on it

that Tommy wipes off.

It's a photo of Techno, Phil and Wilbur. Quackity is also a blur in the side of the photo, jumping towards Wilbur who is laughing. They all look— so much younger here, it makes sense it's a photo which looks about ten years old, but it's still... startling to see it. Wilbur is grinning at the blur that has to be Quackity, Techno stares at Phil with a deadpanned expression, and Phil is smiling an incredibly small smile at the camera.

Tommy snorts and he drops the photo back on the end table.

He's never really thought about Quackity being friends with Techno and Wilbur when they were kids, but it makes sense since Phil trained Quackity, and Wilbur and Quackity are close.

He gets changed out of his clothes which are still cold from the rain. The jumper isn't that big, and Tommy thinks these are Techno's clothes because now that he looks carefully it's *The Blade* merch, with a large crown across the back, and a little crown on the front of it.

It's clear Techno stays here the most, considering the ominous prosthetic leg in the corner of the room. The leg in the corner of the room makes him smile though. It's something that makes perfect sense for Wilbur and Techno, and that thought brings him comfort.

That makes him smile at least a little bit.

He slides into bed, rustling the blankets as he slides underneath the blanket and setting his head on the pillow with a huff.

He tries to sleep.

He really does.

He doesn't even pick up his phone.

Instead, he just stares at the wall for a long moment.

Then a longer moment.

He could... he could go and tell Wilbur now, he could stand up and tell Wilbur that he was Theseus.

He's not— he's not gonna do that.

But he could.

He could go and...

Tommy sits up before he can stop himself, darting out of bed.

He's not going to say anything— he's not gonna say anything at all, he's just gonna go and tell Wilbur about... something, he looks around the room. He'll tell Wilbur that the prosthetic leg is freaking him out.

Yup.

Yeah.

Great plan.

He swings the door open to his area, and walks across the soft yellow carpet, pausing by Wilbur's door for a moment. He can do this, he can just— ask Wilbur for something so

incredibly useless.

A glass of water?

He'll figure it out later.

With a sigh, he approaches the door.

Alright.

He can do this, he just wants to talk to Wilbur.

Tommy swings open the door.

Wilbur is laying flat on his stomach, arms spread out either side of him. It's not hard to imagine Wilbur with wings like that, and Tommy wonders if Wilbur ever sleeps on his back or not.

He stares at Wilbur for a few more moments, "Wil," he whispers into the room.

Nothing.

"Wilbur Soot," Tommy whispers again, leaning against the doorframe.

Again, nothing.

Wilbur is snoring quite loudly in fact, and Tommy can feel his heart beating in his throat. He might wake up Wilbur, he could wake up Wilbur, he could wake up Wilbur and come clean and tell him that he was Theseus and he was sorry and—

His hand hovers by the lightswitch. He could flick that upwards, tell Wilbur everything. He wants to, his hand twitches towards the lightswitch even more. He could— he could do this, he could—

Wilbur deserves explanations and Tommy needs to give them and—

He doesn't turn on the light.

He doesn't wake up Wilbur.

Instead, he leans against the door frame, sighing again. Wilbur's snoring is steady and helps calm Tommy down. He opens his mouth and closes it again, he almost lets the words spill out of him.

He can feel the words in the back of his throat and—

"I'm Theseus," Tommy says and Wilbur doesn't move slightly, nothing but the snoring to tell him that Tommy hasn't lost everything. "I— and I'm a coward. And I'll never tell you."

And Tommy almost lets himself say everything, he almost confesses everything, he just almost lets everything fall, about how he doesn't want to be Theseus anymore, so he isn't and he's going to get better.

He's going to be better.

"And... I guess I'm sorry?"

Silence.

Tommy didn't expect much more.

He watches Wilbur for a few moments, he knows Wilbur hasn't heard. If Wilbur had heard Tommy would've known, Wilbur would have said something, Tommy would've heard him say something or react or he'd be bleeding on the ground now.

Just... nothing.

Tommy hesitates for a few moments.

He goes back towards his room, burying himself underneath the blankets as if that will remove the freezing feeling settled deep in his bones.

Wilbur wakes up with a flash of red in the back of his mind and the fact that his breathing is uneven. His chest feels tight and his hands are gripping the blanket on either side of him. His breathing is uneven and gasping.

His back hurts.

He's used to that, the pain in his back that never really leaves. Part of it is muscles, part of it is psychological but all of it hurts.

And he knows that Tommy is next to him, too close— he doesn't want to wake Tommy up. His breathing isn't working, and he can barely think. He can barely close his eyes and try to calm himself down, it's all red.

There's a shuffling noise next to him, and Wilbur glances over at Tommy who is curled up in a ball with a blanket thrown over his shoulders. Neither of them are clinging to each other and for that Wilbur is grateful.

He manages to stumble off the bed, almost whacking his head on the wall as he does so, and staggering out into the main living area. It's dark, but Wilbur's eyesight is used to it, and he manages not to trip over anything as he makes his way into the kitchen.

The movement makes Wilbur's back twinge again, and he almost wants to stop and roll up into a ball in pain on the floor. Wait until Tommy or someone else finds him, but he's an adult and Tommy will probably freak out and he's *fine*.

The kitchen has a low light in it, a light Phil or Techno or— it doesn't matter, put in because Wilbur kept getting headaches from the overhead lights. The small, dim light is more than enough for Wilbur to do what he needs.

Without hesitation he opens one of the drawers.

His back hurts. His back really fucking hurts.

He knows it's phantom pain, he knows there's nothing painful there apart from muscles that might be pulled and there's no blood but it hurts so much that he can barely think. He swings open the drawer and grabs the first painkillers his clammy hands can grab.

The back of his mind knows taking pills dry is incredibly unsafe, so he manages to grab a dirty glass and fill that up with shaking hands. Then he has three, because he's allowed to take three when it's bad.

It's bad.

Wilbur's hands are shaking and he holds onto the counter.

He's not scared of Theseus— he's not scared of the colour red, he's not scared of this— he's not scared, he's not scared.

His hands are still shaking so much.

There's a noise behind him, and Wilbur whirls around, Tommy is standing in the doorway to his side of the apartment, eyes blurry and light behind him that Wilbur squints at.

"Wha's up?" Tommy asks, stepping into the room and stumbling over a wire on the floor and grabbing onto the wall.

"Uh," Wilbur manages, "Yeah— uh, uh— yeah."

Tommy steps forwards a little bit, "It is dark as shit. What's up?"

"Just... had a nightmare," Wilbur says slowly, "My back flared up."

Tommy takes a few more steps forwards, clearly struggling in the dark, but Wilbur can see the nervousness on Tommy's face, as if he's somehow caused any of this. He holds the guilt of someone who has caused nightmares in his shoulders.

Wilbur doesn't know how to think about it.

"What about?" Tommy asks.

Theseus.

It's always about Theseus or Eret or a weird combination of the two— or being trapped, or being hurt or being helpless because of them or Theseus killing them or Theseus hurting him or... Theseus.

Fucking. Theseus.

"Doesn't matter," Wilbur manages, his hands curl onto the edges of the counter and he looks down. His hands shake from the sheer effort he is using to hold on. "It doesn't— it's fine, I'm fine."

"We both know you're lying."

"Shut the fuck up," there's no real bite to his voice.

Tommy sighs, stepping forwards, his eyes are slightly adjusted to the dark but no where near as much as Wilbur's are.

"Are your eyes *glowing*?" Tommy asks.

"Probably," Wilbur says, "I can see in the dark, Tommy."

His hands are still curled over the edge of the counter, the little overhang between the wooden cabinet and the marble countertop. He's still shaking a lot and he wants Tommy to go back to bed.

"I just... had a nightmare, that's all."

Tommy moves forwards and stands in the kitchen, crossing his arms. "What about? Talking about it can help."

“I’m not telling you what my nightmares are about, Tommy,” Wilbur sighs, he half folds over the top of the counter, resting his forehead on the cool counter beneath him. It’s a nice counter, he should cook here more.

He can’t cook.

He should try learn.

“Why not?” Tommy says, “I’ll tell you about my nightmares.”

“I don’t need—” Wilbur’s tone starts off as sharp and it breaks off into something more gentle, “I don’t need to know about your nightmares Tommy, I don’t want to know... I’m okay, go back to bed.”

“I’m your person!” Tommy says brightly, too brightly, and Wilbur almost wants to squint away from it. “Tell me things, I’m not going to tell anyone— talking about it helps.”

“With a therapist, not a child,” Wilbur snaps.

Tommy draws away from him, something *so, so* sad on his face that Wilbur wants to apologise for but his voice gets caught in his voice. He just glances back and forth between Wilbur and the door.

“Sorry— sorry, I’m sorry. Sorry. Just— I don’t—”

“That’s okay, it’s fine— chill.”

Wilbur sighs, running a hand through his hair and unable to barely think beyond the static in his brain. He should tell Tommy, he should tell someone who isn’t Techno, and Tommy has

been asking and—

He just needs to get it off his chest.

“It was about Theseus,” Wilbur says, “Uh— he— you’ve probably heard about the library fight, but yeah— it was intense sometimes, and— yeah.”

Tommy has gone completely still, his shoulders have tensed up towards his ears and he’s barely breathing.

This is why Wilbur doesn’t tell people things, he swears to fucking Prime—

Then Tommy looks up at him, face... incredibly calm. “Are you scared of Theseus?”

“Fucking— getting straight to it then,” Wilbur manages. “I guess? I don’t— I don’t know, yeah? But no. He’s a kid and I— I feel so bad for him but... he’s fucking terrifying when you’re fighting him.”

“He is?” Tommy asks, tilting his head.

Tommy seems so incredibly calm, his face is blank and just staring at Wilbur.

Wilbur nods. “Just— he has complete control, and— he’s just scary. I’m scared of him— but, it’s fine. I’ll be fine. Don’t worry about me.”

“Would you kill him?” Tommy asks.

If Wilbur was drinking water he would’ve spat it all out.

Instead, his heart drops in his chest and he just stares at Tommy who's face is blank and he is just watching Wilbur, watching him for reactions and body language and Wilbur hates how closely Tommy is watching him.

He feels sick.

He can barely say a word—

“You would, wouldn't you?” Tommy asks.

“No!” Wilbur yells, “No— never, never, no— I'm not going to kill a kid. No, no matter what — no, he's— he's a lot of things but he doesn't deserve to be dead because he wronged me. I'm scared of him— I don't— I don't want him *fucking dead* .”

Tommy stares at him.

Wilbur shakes his head, “I'm gonna be sick, for fuck's sake— I don't want to kill people Tommy, I don't want to hurt people. I don't— no. No. Tommy what the *fuck* ?”

Tommy just stares at him. “I dunno.”

“I'm not— no, Tommy, I'm not gonna hurt him.”

“I wouldn't blame you if you did.”

Wilbur doesn't like the feeling that settles in his stomach, something ugly. “Come on,” Wilbur says gently, he knows the look on Tommy's face, he's seen it on Techno's face when someone's lost in their own head.

Tommy looks at him, and Wilbur puts his hand on Tommy's shoulder. "C'mon kid."

"You're doing that thing where you push your needs aside for mine, I'm fine," Tommy grabs Wilbur's wrist and pushes his hand away, "Talk more about Theseus— why are you scared of him?"

"No," Wilbur says gently, "C'mon, you need to go to bed. I need to go to bed."

Tommy just stares at him, mouth slightly open.

"Kid," Wilbur stresses the word more than he has to, but it has the intended effect and Tommy just looks at him. "I'm okay, alright? We both need sleep, it is— incredibly late."

"But—"

"It can wait until the morning," Wilbur says, "I'll even sleep on the couch."

Tommy seems to like that deal, and whatever his current emotion is, is overridden by the need to be an annoying little brother. A rather effective thing, if Wilbur says so himself because his smile quirks up.

"Will you?" He asks, his voice doesn't have the sheer level of mirth as it might have before, but he smiles regardless, and Wilbur pretends that he can't see how the smile doesn't reach his eyes.

It's not his place to push yet.

"Sure," Wilbur says, "And you can have my— extremely fucking expensive bed, can sleep like a starfish or whatever it is children do."

“I’m not a child.”

“You’re sixteen.”

Tommy pulls a face.

Wilbur just huffs, “Go to sleep you insolent child.”

Tommy’s face morphs into something more serious, and Wilbur’s not sure when Tommy started looking like Techno, but he does. It makes Wilbur’s own expression soften, something twinging in his heart that Tommy’s concern looks like Techno’s concern. “Are you okay?” Tommy asks gently, “I worry about you.”

“You don’t have to,” Wilbur replies as gently as he can. “I’m okay— I’ll be okay. Please, please don’t worry about me Tommy, you have enough to worry about—”

“That’s a dumb reason not to worry,” Tommy says, “I worry about you, that’s okay. I have lots of people worrying for me, I don’t know who is worrying for you.”

Wilbur just gives him a sad smile, “We’ll worry about each other then.”

Tommy offers his hand out, in what is supposed to be a handshake.

Wilbur takes it without hesitation.

Tommy shakes his hand and then nods his head, dropping Wilbur’s hand and nodding again. “There we go, we made a deal.”

“Well, my first concern is that neither of us are going to bed, so go to bed you gremlin child. I’ll sleep on the couch because you want me to be in pain, I’ll be in *soooo* much pain when I wake up, my back is already bad and you make me sleep on this tiny—”

Tommy just flips him off, and walks away.

Wilbur laughs to himself, before grabbing the blanket off the couch and settling down.

Sleeping on the couch is better for his back, Wilbur won’t deny it. That might be half of the reason he let Tommy have the bed, and... well Wilbur doesn’t need the average amount of sleep most people do.

He isn’t supposed to do it at a certain point. But he only needs... four hours every two days. Or just fourteen hours every week, it’s... okay, Wilbur likes having more hours in the day but he also knows most of that isn’t his choice. If he could sleep longer he would.

Instead, he is left to stare up at the ceiling, trying to sleep and inevitably failing because his biology is against him in every sense of the word. He sighs, huffing underneath his breath. He hates this.

He could have meds.

Wilbur sighs, staring at the ceiling.

It is a remarkably boring ceiling.

Eventually, his eyes get heavier and his mind gets emptier and emptier until he knows he’s about to be lulled off to sleep. He is aware of Tommy sleeping next door, he’s snoring quite loudly.

He goes to sleep.

It's nice.

He should try sleep more.

He wakes up with light in his eyes, the early morning sun getting into his eyes. He squints, holding his hand over his eyes and blinking. Bright lights are the fucking worst. His eyes need a moment to adjust to them.

He hears scuffling around in the kitchen, and the back of his brain, the part that's a hero and has trained for every worst case scenario is ready to start fighting. The part of his brain that is becoming a normally adjusted person just sighs.

"Tommy?" Wilbur calls out, "What are you doing?"

"Makin' food," Tommy says, "I was trying to do an omelette but that fell apart, and now it's kinda like... a mess, but that's fine."

"What's the time?" Wilbur swings his legs over the side of the couch and rubs at his eyes.

"Eleven," Tommy says, "Have the shitty omelette, I want the nice one."

Wilbur staggers over to the kitchen where he looks at the omelette, which is a mess of things, but Wilbur doesn't care all that much because it should taste the same.

Tommy is hunched over the very nice stove that Wilbur has, he has a much nicer-looking omelette in the pan than the mess of the thing on the plate in front of Wilbur. He looks like he's concentrating, like all of his brain power is going into making this thing.

He picks up the plate and starts scarfing the omelette. His phone is on the counter, and he puts the plate down and reaches to his phone.

He has about— a million missed calls from Techno.

Wilbur is late for work.

He was supposed to be at work at ten, he had some paperwork he said he'd help Techno with. He wasn't supposed to be there for the apprentice shit, and the fact Techno is calling him makes him nervous.

Alright...

Wilbur's phone is ringing in his hand, *'Techno'* his contact photo of Techno laying on the ground, screaming, after Wilbur had said something a couple years ago shows up, and Wilbur snorts at it.

He glances up at Tommy, calling Techno can wait.

He is late for work.

But— he's been later before.

He picks up the phone, holding it to his ear. "I'm gonna be late," is the first thing he says and Techno sighs dramatically into his ear.

"You already are late."

“Techno, c’mon it’s Tommy, I’m not just gonna kick him out— we’ll eat and get ready and then we’ll leave. It’ll be like... twenty minutes or so, then travel which will be a bit longer but— c’mon.”

“It’s still your job.”

“I’ve had my job for like eleven years, I’ve been later for less, I’ll make it there in time for our patrol, don’t worry lil’ bro—”

“I’ll kill you.”

“Lil’ bro,” Wilbur continues with a grin on his face and Techno sighs dramatically. “I will be there for our patrol, just like old times. Just— lemme have a big longer with Tommy, it’ll be like forty minutes. Please?”

Techno sighs, once again, he’s been doing that a lot more recently. *“Okay, I’ll cover for you. If anyone asks uh— I dunno play your trauma card.”*

“Got it, I had a terrible panic attack.”

“You are a terrible influence on me.”

“I’m not the one who tried to shoot a president,” Wilbur replies and Tommy is looking at him, clearly amused with the side of the encounter he’s been hearing. “If I recount correctly you’re the bad influence.”

Techno sighs, *“Alright, bye, love you.”*

“Bye,” Wilbur says, “See you soon.”

And Techno hangs up.

Tommy looks incredibly fucking amused about the entire thing, arms crossed, eyebrow raised and Wilbur puts his phone down again.

“You’re totally a bad influence.”

“Shut up,” Wilbur says, “Eat your scrambled omelette.”

“I’d like to see you do better, *Wilbur Soot* .”

“Okay, *Thomas Underscore*. ”

Wilbur goes back to his omelette, Tommy raises an eyebrow at him.

“Is there like— a reason you’re not using a fork?”

“Don’t like the feel of metal in my mouth,” Wilbur says, “Like— okay, this is gonna sound odd, but when I use cutlery I can just taste all the metal and nothing else. I hate the texture and the temperature differences and— like I’ll do it, it’s just most food can be eaten with your hands if you commit.”

“What about plastic cutlery?”

“That’s fine.”

“Wooden cutlery?”

“Bothers me, but less than metal.”

Tommy looks at him for a long moment, before pointing a spatula at him accusingly, “You, Wilbur Soot, are an incredibly odd man.”

Wilbur nods slowly, finishing the omelette and putting the plate back down on the counter, then he realises the responsible adult thing to do would be to go rinse off the plate and probably do the dishes from this entire thing.

Tommy makes his own omelette, which looks a lot nicer than Wilbur’s.

“So,” Tommy deadpans, mouth half-full of food in a way that is not amazing for Wilbur to witness. “What’s your plans for today?”

“Uh— have Techno tell me about the apprentices that are being assigned today, finish his paperwork ‘cause I said I would. Go on patrol with him, watch as he inevitably throws a brick at a cop.”

Tommy grins, nodding his head and going back to his food. “Should I start beef on Twitter again?”

“Why?”

“I am really bored,” Tommy says, “Look— it would be really funny, let me get into beef with the president, I could totally ratio the president.”

Wilbur just stares at him for a long moment before pinching the bridge of his nose. “Tommy, c’mon. That would not be worth it.”

“Would be really funny.”

“... it would. Anyway, don’t do that. The plan is I do the dishes, we both get ready, I gotta go to work and I drop you off at the metro, if that works?”

Tommy nods, scraping the last of the omelette off his plate.

Wilbur takes the plate off of him and it joins the other couple of dishes. Wilbur doesn’t have a dishwasher, because— he doesn’t really know, but he turns the tap on as Tommy shuffles out of his seat.

It’s quiet for a few minutes, as Wilbur does the dishes and Tommy presumably gets dressed and walks around the apartment muttering about the fact he’s lost his phone and his phone has to be basically flat now.

Wilbur turns around, “Oi, Tommy— which station do you wanna be dropped off at—”

The window in the lounge room shatters, and Tommy is completely frozen in place.

Wilbur is one of the best heroes in the business— that did not happen accidentally, he trained and worked and studied for this and—

Still, nothing can deny the fear that courses through him as he sees a bomb hit the floor of his apartment.

That’s a fucking bomb.

In... his... apartment?

Tommy is just standing there, mouth partly open.

He's moving before he can stop himself, barreling into Tommy's side and the pair of them sprawl onto the floor.

Around them the world shakes as it goes off, Wilbur's ears ring and he can barely see anything apart from the dust and smoke starting to bellow around them. The building keeps shaking, and Wilbur looks down.

He's protected Tommy with his body well enough, Tommy seems unharmed, staring ahead with wide eyes.

Then Wilbur feels something dripping down his back, and with a dull realisation he realises it's blood, and another realisation is that he can't feel anything. Not in the back of his head, or his back in general, he's bleeding and he can't feel anything and that implies it's gonna fucking *hurt*.

This is bad.

And that's before the people with guns barge into his apartment.

The only thought Tommy can get out is, *'oh, that's a bomb'*.

Then Wilbur slams into his side, knocking the both of them to the ground, and Tommy is barely aware of anything as he's hit with a wave of heat and noise so deafening he can barely think.

All he knows is that Wilbur is using his own body to protect Tommy.

And that this has *got* to stop happening.

If he had a dollar, for every time a bomb exploded next to him.

He'd have two dollars.

Which isn't a lot.

But it's weird it's happened twice now.

Everything buzzes in his ear, to the point where Tommy can not hear anything. He thinks Wilbur is trying to talk to him, he's not sure, he doesn't look up and instead he focuses on the ringing.

He makes a noise.

He can't hear it outloud, only the vibration in his head.

Is this how he's lost his hearing?

Tommy's head hurts.

Everything aches, his ears are ringing, there's blood dripping down his face and his limbs are heavy with nothing. He grabs onto the wall next to him to try and balance himself as his head spins.

Then he manages to roll his head up and look more at the scene around them. Wilbur sitting against the wall, which was covered in blood, and he's holding his side as well. Tommy sits up, trying to look at the scene.

Around them everything is shit, the apartment is beyond destroyed, fire, dust, anything that was something is destroyed and in rubble around them. The couch is basically decimated, the yellow carpet is in ash-covered chunks.

There's the start of fires around them, smoke bellows around them.

Most alarming though, was the two people in the room with guns.

They're standing facing the window, meaning they came through the door, and the bomb came through the window—

They were waiting.

Both pointed on Wilbur in a laser focus. Their hands didn't shake, the safety was off. They knew what they were doing with guns.

They're Elysium agents, with the gas masks and the goggles over their eyes that Tommy can't see through. They're both wearing all-black, with what seems like a tactical vest over the top. The exception is a small purple flower that they're wearing on their chest, which identifies them as Elysium immediately.

One is much taller than the other, and the shorter one has two purple stripes going from their sleeves up their collar, and Tommy knows those people tend to be kids— he knows that from the library.

They sent a kid to try and kill Wilbur.

A kid who seems to know what they're doing, their arms aren't shaking as they hold the gun out in front of them, directed at Wilbur with an expertise that he can't hope to replicate.

Elysium didn't tend to be this confident in their movements. They tend to give guns to people in order to give them some intimidation. These two look like they don't need the guns and could hand Tommy's ass to him, given the chance.

That somehow scared Tommy more than anything else.

And before Tommy could stop himself, or really think about it, he is crouched in front of Wilbur, both his hands in the air. His ears are still ringing— he thinks he's being spoken to but he can't hear.

He can't hear.

Tommy holds his hands up a bit higher, as the gun points forwards.

"Move!" Is the first word he can hear, his ears are still ringing and they *hurt* but he thinks he's getting some hearing back. He can hear sirens and cars not too far away, he can also see the two people in front of him, with more than the intent to kill Wilbur.

Tommy shakes his head, "I can't do that. Bullets travel through people."

He has no failsafe, no powers. Help won't be here for a while.

If he gets shot here, there is a real possibility he will die.

He doesn't move, he keeps both his hands up in the air, trying to make eye contact with whoever appears to be the leader through the tinted goggles they wear. His hands are shaking slightly.

Wilbur makes a noise that Tommy can't quite hear— it could be a statement or something else, Tommy can't hear shit about shit. He hopes that Wilbur doesn't do anything stupid, Tommy's doing enough stupid for the both of them.

One of them reach forwards to grab Tommy by the arm.

No failsafe, no powers to back him up.

It would be a terrible idea to try and fight them—

Three guesses as to what he's about to do.

He grabs them by the wrist, yanking it to the side and holding as hard as he can.

They stare at him with confusion, just a second of hesitation.

That's all Tommy needs.

He jumps up onto his feet, still with the hold on their wrist.

Tommy brings his other hand up and grabs their hand, pulling it back while holding onto their wrist which makes them cry out in pain.

Tommy has them where he needs them, he manages to grab their shoulder, before turning them around and pressing his arm against their throat.

He pushes enough that it hurts. His other arm on the back of their neck.

He can kill someone like this, he's seen it done, he's seen people have the life choked out of them and fall dead on the floor.

And... he's ready to, that scares him more.

The other one, the other Elysium agent is staring with wide eyes. Gun now with a clear shot on Wilbur.

Tommy tightens the chokehold on the one he's holding. "Don't," he snaps. "Please don't make me hurt them."

"Do it!" The one Tommy's holding rasps out as Tommy crushes their airpipe a little bit more. "If I die, I die, we still will complete the mission—"

That sounds like hero tower talk.

The part of his mind which is not quite here wonders if Wilbur or Techno have ever said those things.

Huh.

The other agent is shaking, they're clearly younger and without the support of whoever was supposed to be in charge of this mission something is crumbling and Tommy needs to rely on that.

"Shoot," the one Tommy is holding hisses.

And Tommy sees the other agent stand up a little straighter, shaking less and—

They're gonna shoot.

Tommy throws the agent he was holding to the side, and they make a thump as they hit the ground. He lunges forwards again, grabbing the outstretched gun and pointing it against his chest.

He has no intention of a repeat of the gala, so he twists the gun, managing to use his elbow to dig into their arm.

They let go of the gun.

It takes little more than a push and a well placed piece of— something on the ground, and they hit the floor like their partner just did.

And Tommy does not hesitate to brandish the gun, kneeling half over them, he is shaking but not from nerves, instead adrenaline. He knows he'd be okay with doing this, if it came down to this.

That doesn't make him feel as sick as it might have used to.

He smacks them in the face with the gun, their head whipping to the side with a dangerous noise.

With little hesitation he points the gun under the person's chin with far more force he needs to, and they whimper.

He looks up at the partner who's on their feet again and Tommy glares daggers at them, "If you fucking move wrong I will blow their brains out. Got it? Wilbur's apartment is already fucking trashed."

The partner drops their gun to the ground and Tommy finds himself giving a little amount of fuck's about that because Wilbur is still sitting against the wall, and now the wall has a nasty smear of blood on it, which Tommy thinks is from Wilbur's back.

Fuck.

Tommy pushes the gun forwards even more.

He knows the safety is off.

It would be so easy to end a life.

“Alright motherfucker,” Tommy spits, “You know Hannah, Chiron? I know Hannah, Chiron. And you’re going to tell her exactly what I fucking say. Alright?”

His ears are still ringing.

He thinks one of them are bleeding.

“Okay, okay, don’t hurt me,” the person on the ground, with a gun under their chin says, which is honestly... probably a good move all things considered. Because Tommy is pissed and he has a gun.

Holy fuck, he has a gun.

Past Tommy would be crying, screaming and throwing up knowing he’s pointing a gun at someone.

"You better listen real fuckin' damn good or else I'll fuckin' blow your brains out. Tell Hannah, that if she fuckin' targets one of my family again. I will go to Reddings and I will kill all of them. Hannah knows I can, she knows I will—I think you know that I can and I will."

It's a bluff. Tommy's not sure if he could even lift a feather with his powers, let alone decimate several people, but Hannah doesn't know that and the person who he is pointing a gun at also doesn't know that.

He pushes the gun forwards and they whimper.

"Stop fuckin' whimpering and listen to me. You signed up to join a terrorist group, you can handle the barrel end of your own gun. Hector. They call Wilbur, Hector there— you might know that..."

Tommy pauses for a few moments, what fucking name does he give himself. Hannah knows him as three different things.

"Tell— Chiron. That SBI are under Prometheus's protection," and Tommy prays to nothing else that he's gotten the name they call him right because if he hasn't that's going to be really awkward. "Do you fuckin' understand me?"

They nod frantically, moving against the barrel of the gun and wincing slightly at the movement.

"And that's a promise if any of them get dragged into your self-righteous bullshit again, I will go there, and I will kill every last person there with my bare hands if I fucking have to. You leave us out of this!"

And for good measure, he hits them across the face with the gun, and their head snaps to the side, hopefully enough to get whiplash. But Tommy can't be hoping on too much at the moment.

"Got it?" Tommy snaps.

They nod a little bit frantically.

He throws the gun to the side, and it goes skidding across the floor, hitting into a wall with a noise that Tommy quite enjoys. He stares down at the agent, before punching them across the face for good measure.

They cry out, and their partner goes to jump forwards.

Tommy just raises a hand.

“They’re under my protection!” Tommy yells at them again, really hoping he’s driving home that point, because that is the entire intention. “I will keep them safe from *fuckers* like you. So you need to fucking leave before I decide to put a bullet in your brain.”

He stands up again, he resists the urge to kick the agent in the side. Both the one on the ground, and the one standing up are shaking, Tommy can’t see their expressions behind their masks and goggles but he can feel the terrified looks in their eyes.

As they run, Tommy barely focuses on them, not while Wilbur is bleeding and hurt.

“Hey, hey, hey,” Tommy scrambles back over to Wilbur, who is staring at him with wide eyes, “You’re fine— you’re fine— holy fuck that’s a lot of blood, holy shit why is your back bleeding so much? Wilbur what the fuck—”

“‘m good,” Wilbur rasps out, his voice breaks a little bit, “We gotta get outta here, there’s gonna be— people swarming the— thing and— yeah. The building might fall apart or some shit.”

Tommy nods, he grabs Wilbur by the arm and Wilbur makes a small noise in the back of his throat, he manages to single handedly drag Wilbur up onto his feet as Wilbur grits his teeth and bears whatever pain he’s in.

“What hurts?” Tommy says, he puts Wilbur’s arm around his shoulders to try and keep him stable.

“I need you to look at my back,” Wilbur says, “How much blood— I have more veins and nerve endings there than the normal person— phantomly shit. I gotta— know how bad it is.”

Tommy looks at Wilbur for a moment, before managing to get a glimpse at his blood-soaked t-shirt. The entire thing is a disgusting brownish-reddish colour that is all across the back of Wilbur’s shirt.

Perhaps the more slightly horrifying thing are the chunks of metal sticking out of Wilbur’s back.

Tommy has a pretty strong stomach, he’s seen some shit, he’s done some shit— but this makes him want to start throwing up. Any amount of metal is too much, and Tommy can see about five big chunks of metal sticking out of Wilbur’s back.

He wants to throw up, bile rises up in his throat.

“It’s bad,” Tommy manages, putting a hand over his mouth, “Oh fuck, it’s so bad— Wilbur, it’s so bad.”

Wilbur takes a deep breath, “Alright, I can’t feel anything. It’s okay, it’s fine—” he grabs Tommy by the arm and Tommy just stares at him with wide eyes. “The metal should be stopping most of the blood.”

“Your shirt is drenched in blood,” Tommy squeaks out.

Wilbur nods, closing his eyes and holding onto Tommy for a long moment. He doesn’t say anything, and Tommy can’t help but the panic starting to claw its way up his stomach and

into his throat.

His throat feels impossibly small, and burns, his eyes are burning. Whether that's from the dust or the ash or tears, Tommy doesn't know. What he does know is this panic is really and his hands are shaking an impossible amount.

"Alright," Wilbur opens his eyes again, grip on Tommy's arm tightening. "I can still move, I can still walk. We need to get out of here, and I apparently need quite desperate medical attention. Shock does wonders."

"It's— it's really bad, Wil," Tommy whispers.

Wilbur nods, "Yup. Not great. We have to go either way, and I'd much rather walk out of the building than have to be dragged out. I'm okay, I can walk, just— stay near."

Tommy nods, dropping Wilbur's arm and the two of them start. Tommy picks up the gun again, holding it loosely in his hand as he heads towards the door. He pauses in front of the door, pressing his ear against it.

Quiet.

He can't hear people outside, it's not quiet by any means. He can hear people yelling and things breaking, but it's quieter than if multiple people were going to storm the apartment, or there was a gunfight just outside.

"What you did was fuckin' terrifying, you're fuckin' scary," Wilbur says, and Tommy turns back around, Wilbur is grabbing onto the wall to steady himself, his eyes aren't quite focused. "You're like Techno when he goes all—"

"All?"

“Angry,” Wilbur says, “You’re both fuckin’ terrifying.”

Tommy ignores that twange of guilt in his stomach he’s getting worse at annoying. Wilbur’s scared of Tommy and Theseus, and Tommy doesn’t know what he’s supposed to be doing with that.

Instead, he opens the door.

The hallway is not exactly in ruins, but things are knocked over. The shitty art on the wall is on the ground, the pot plants are knocked over with dirt spilling out of them.

Tommy takes pity on the closest pot plant and stands it up, trying to scoop as much dirt back into it as he can, while Wilbur trails behind him.

They head towards the elevator, both of them know that’s not an option for getting down. But it’s the closest thing to getting down, and what sorta elevator system doesn’t have a staircase nearby.

Nothing happens as they reach the elevator door, but Wilbur grabs Tommy and swings open a door a few metres away from it.

They peer down the incredibly long stairwell, it spirals down the seven floors that are below them. It’s a surprisingly nice stairwell, a lot nicer than the one in the heroes tower. The banisters are full blocks of concrete, which will be amazing to hide behind.

It’s not the destroyed and ruined, it’s... not *nice* but it’s not terrible. Tommy wouldn’t want to live here or anything, but it might be the safest place in the building.

Now would have been a *really* nice time, for Wilbur to live somewhere with less stories, how the fuck would they get out of the heroes tower if it came to this?

It's a long way to fall.

Tommy is greeted with a gun pointed up at him.

Wilbur grabs Tommy by the back of the shirt, yanking him back.

Tommy screams, twisting around to yell at Wilbur.

Wilbur grabs Tommy, dragging him down towards the stairs, he hits his head on the concrete banister and goes to yell at Wilbur

The wall right where Tommy was standing is sprayed with bullets and the holes in the wall do nothing to give him any sort of confidence.

Tommy and Wilbur glance at each other.

"Can you do this?" Wilbur whispers, "They have guns— it'll be dangerous. And I don't want you to be hurt—"

Tommy stares at the gun in his hand, and he looks at Wilbur, "I'll be fine."

"I'm worried about you," Wilbur says with a soft smile, he grabs Tommy's shoulder and squeezes slightly. "I can handle this."

"So can I."

Wilbur pops his head up again.

A bullet flies past his face, and there's a line of red on the side of his face, going from just next to the side of his eye upwards. It's a graze, but it's still a head injury and Tommy makes a small noise.

They're shooting to kill, shooting to kill Wilbur.

Okay.

Tommy needs a better spot to shoot, there is a landing just down there. It will be a risk trying to get there, he will have to throw himself into the wall and pray he doesn't get shot along the way and then shoot.

But it feels like they have a lack of time, with Wilbur as injured as he is and the potential for more bombs, more agents, now is the best time to get out. What if the apartment collapses? What if someone comes from behind and grabs Wilbur?

They need to get out as soon as possible.

And Tommy can't think of any better ideas.

Tommy throws himself against the wall, it cracks next to him slightly, and he lifts the gun before firing to the best of his ability.

There are three shots and then a gasping noise and silence.

He doesn't hear a body hit the floor.

He could've just killed someone.

He could've just fucking killed someone.

It might not even be a life or death scenario and he could've just killed someone— he peaks over the edge of the railing, trying to see who is standing at the bottom of the staircase.

In turn for that, he gets five shots dangerously close to his face, and his ears ring at that.

His head spins from the noise of it, he's shooting a gun in an extremely small stairwell, of course, it's going to hurt his ears. Ow. He feels up to the side of his head, and blood is streaming out of his ear. It's caked onto the side of his head.

Ow.

“Look!” Tommy yells down below him and he can barely hear the own words that are coming out of his mouth, “I don't want to hurt you. Please don't make me hurt you, I will win this fight.”

He doesn't know that.

But a bout of confidence never hurt.

“Why are you shooting at me, fucker?” The person calls back, and it's more distant than it should be, Tommy has to strain to hear it.

He's really fucked his hearing.

“You shot at me first!” Tommy yells back.

“I was shooting for Spectre, not for you.”

“Well, I can’t fuckin’ let you shoot Spectre now, can I?”

Tommy pauses, he looks at Wilbur who is sitting on the stairwell, back against the furthest wall, breathing in and out heavily. His eyes are screwed shut and he is wheezing in and out, there’s a rattling sound in his breaths which Tommy doesn’t like at all.

He could leave Wilbur here.

He could get out.

He doesn’t hear the response that is yelled back at him, he knows something is said but he can’t make out the words well enough to do anything.

Every part of him wants to leave, he is good at that, running when it gets hard and it has gotten beyond hard.

Instead, Tommy crouches down, trying to hide behind the banister the best he can, and he starts walking incredibly slowly. He shuffles down the stairs, keeping his head down and listening for the sound of breathing.

He can feel Wilbur’s eyes on his back as he sneaks down.

Hands still holding the gun tightly, his hands aren’t shaking and that surprises him more.

When he gets close enough to see the Elysium agent he pauses, the agent is standing there remarkably calmly on the landing. Leaning against the wall, gun lazily in their hand.

Tommy takes a deep breath.

This is incredibly fucking stupid.

But, it might work.

He jumps out of hiding, grabbing the Elysium agent and trying to knock the gun out of their hand.

Instead, he gets punched in the face and he staggers to the side, but it's a good enough distraction and that was all Tommy wanted—

“Wilbur, go you fucking idiot!” Tommy yells.

That manages to get something in Wilbur's useless, pea-sized brain to work, because he darts past Tommy and the Elysium agent, down the stairs and he keeps on running. Good.

He tries to grapple with the agent, trying to grab them and knock them into the stairs, or do anything to let go of his grip so he can also get away.

Instead, there's a heavy hand on his shoulder and Tommy knows he doesn't have the energy to win this fight.

He knows that he might die because of his stupid fucking mistake.

The Elysium agent grabs him, slamming him into the floor.

And before Tommy can even think of anything to do back, there are hands around his throat *squeezing* and Tommy can't fucking breathe, even as he fights against them and does anything to try and get air.

Is this how he'll die?

Tommy's hands claw at the agent's, as he kicks his legs and does anything to try and breathe. His throat hurts from the smoke already, and he can feel his energy fading as he kicks and thrashes.

He can't fucking breathe—

The agent grins down at him.

“Wilbur!” He cries out, kicking his legs, “Wilbur! Help me!” His words are cut off by choking noise and he can't breathe.

He knows he has to be drawing blood on the agent's arm as he claws and splutters and does anything for air. He's about to explode, he can't— he can't keep fighting this, he can't— he can't breathe.

Black dots dance in his vision, and he grabs onto the agent's arms as hard as he can, trying to break himself free. Kicking and thrashing and fighting because he can't do down fighting—he can't breathe, it hurts, it hurts.

Where's Wilbur—

He—

“Please,” Tommy begs, “Please don't— do this—” once again his cut off as no more air can get past despite how much he's clawing and pleading and he doesn't want to fucking die.

Being on the ground, breath kicked out of him as Tommy murmurs apologies, he's small and young and he doesn't know better—

He tries one last burst of energy, refusing to be the same person he was when he was younger. “*WILBUR!*” He screams, it tears at his throat.

His vision starts fading, his arms go limp and he stops fighting, his limbs are weighed down by an invisible weight, and even the thought of trying to fight exhausts him more. He almost closes his eyes.

Then Wilbur, and Tommy can't summon the energy or will to even react to that.

Wilbur goes transparent.

He phases his arm through the Elysium member's body.

Tommy doesn't know exactly what happens, but the Elysium member's eyes go wide as he stares down at the arm which is now protruding out of their chest. Tommy stares too, with the same wide eyes.

There's a sickening squelch as Wilbur tears his arm out of the agent's body.

And the Elysium member slumps onto the floor without a word, a gaping hole in their chest.

Then he can breathe again, only slightly, but there's no weight around his neck and he is spluttering and gasping for air.

He stares at the body on the ground, now with a hole in his chest and blood and other shit on the floor. He stares in horror as he tries to breathe, in and out, but nothing seems to work as he gasps.

His neck hurts, breathing hurts, everything hurts and he stares at Wilbur with wide eyes, as Wilbur heaves in and out, staring at his own bloody arm.

Wilbur's arm is bloody and covered in shit Tommy doesn't even want to start thinking about.

Tommy stares, for a long moment, eyes wide.

They were going to kill him.

But still, they're dead.

Tommy knows the feeling of silence, he knows the feeling of shock, and he can not think of a single word which puts into words what he is feeling. A mix of panic, shock, disgust, sick, joy, relief, so much is swelling around in his head and he can barely make sense of any of it.

Wilbur just killed someone, maybe— but it looks like he just killed someone.

“You can do that?” Tommy whispers.

Wilbur nods, “Matter is pushed away,” he stares at his arm, “I think I’m gonna be sick.”

“Why— why did you—” Tommy still struggles to breathe, and his breaths come out gasping. “Holy fuck, Wilbur you— you killed.”

“I wasn’t going to let you die!” Wilbur rasps out, “I couldn’t think of what to do— I couldn’t — it was the first thing. I wasn’t just gonna leave you behind to die,” Wilbur says, he’s also breathing heavily, chest heaving up and down. He stares at his hand again and he makes a gagging noise, turning around. “I was left before— holy shit, I could’ve left you behind, holy fuck I would’ve been like Eret.”

He uselessly tries to wipe his hands on his pants, and he turns to look at Tommy.

“Are you okay? Holy shit, are you—”

“They were gonna kill me,” Tommy rasps out, his throat hurts and his brain is running faster than he can keep up, because that’s the closest he’s come to dying in a long time, and that’s the most he’s ever fought it and holy shit he can breathe now. “They— they were gonna kill me.”

Wilbur glances at the body to the side, “They might not be dead,” he almost pleads with himself. “It’s their abdomen not their chest, I didn’t— I might not have gotten anything bad. We—”

Then Wilbur’s legs give out on him, and Tommy is catching him quicker than he thought possible. He holds onto Wilbur, ignoring the lifeless body next to them. Tommy’s seen bodies before this is nothing.

The lurching in his stomach tells him otherwise.

“C’mon,” Tommy says.

“I should’ve run back quicker,” Wilbur rasps out, as Tommy starts to walk them both down the stairs. “I’m sorry— I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I should’ve— you could’ve died and I just froze and— *fuck* this is just like Eret.”

“It’s not,” Tommy says, “You came back. I’m not dead on the floor, we’re fine. Okay, we’re fine.”

Tommy feels less than fine, there are tears stinging at his eyes and breathing is still a labour. No matter how much he breathes it feels like not enough, and his chest aches at every breath.

His neck hurts, his eyes hurt.

He might actually need therapy after this.

They get down an impressive number of flights, Tommy grabbing onto Wilbur as he can feel the smoke get thicker and thicker, it makes breathing harder and it hurts his throat even more than it already is.

He is going to have serious fucking lung damage after this.

Wilbur stops, grabbing onto the railing of the stairs to wheeze, Tommy's eyes are watery and filled with smoke and he watches as Wilbur coughs dangerously. His head slumps slightly and he grips the railing.

"I'm good here," Wilbur manages.

"No, we're getting out."

"I'm good," Wilbur says, choked around the smoke. "Just—"

Tommy starts to drag Wilbur even more, he's barely moving his feet at this point, and Tommy is almost solely carrying his weight, Wilbur isn't light by any means, but Tommy has the motivation and drive to do this, and a shit tonne of adrenaline.

The stairs are in surprisingly good shape, a chip or part of a stair crumbled, bits in the wall. It's well enough together that Tommy can drag Wilbur down the stairs, ignoring the way that Wilbur is getting limper and limper in his grip, and he's saying less and less.

They're fine.

They're almost there.

They're both gonna be okay.

Eventually, it is the last landing, and Tommy kicks the door open with his foot and drags Wilbur out of the stairwell.

They reach the lobby, it's in shambles, and there's shit everywhere. There are no people here, it's completely empty, the shitty sofa things are upturned, the pots are shattered and the front desk barely resembles a front desk anymore. Floors tiles are shattered and chunks of wall are just laying on the destroyed floor.

The stairwell they've come out of is at the back, there's another one slightly ahead, and this place is filled with smoke and fire. Tommy splutters as they make their way down here, and he can feel his lungs hurting.

It all hurts.

He's sick of this hurting.

Wilbur manages to break his grip from Tommy, and stagger towards the wall, which he presses his hand against as he tries to breathe.

Then Wilbur slides down the wall until he's sitting with his head between his knees and wheezing for breath, and Tommy stops.

His eyes feel just as heavy, it feels like too much, he can barely breathe and everything fucking hurts so badly. They just— they just need a little bit of a break, then Tommy can get them moving again.

He lands on the ground next to Wilbur, leaning the side of his face against the wall, so he's still looking at Wilbur who is looking straight ahead with a certain look in his eyes.

"Tommy," Wilbur whispers, turning to look at him and the movement takes far too much effort. "Tommy— I think— I think I'm going to pass out soon."

"What? Wil, no— you—"

"Tommy," Wilbur says, "I love you so much, alright? You're one of my favourite— favourite people in the universe—" he coughs heavily and Tommy finds himself doing the same as more smoke fills his throat. "And— and we're almost out. We're on the right floor— we're..." his eyes flutter closed for a moment. "And— I think my adrenaline is wearing out, or blood loss or— or something else."

"Wil..."

Tommy doesn't remember what fresh air feels like.

"And— we're almost there, and you're gonna have to probably drag me. But you're— you're strong and you can do this, and— then there will be paramedics and healers and— we'll be okay. If you—" Wilbur hacks again, and Tommy hates the noise of it. "Need to, drop me, alright? Then you can tell a firefighter or someone else— where I am and— it's better one of ___"

"Wilbur I swear to fuckin'—"

"It's better one of us lives than neither, alright? I'm going to be fine, I'll be—" he stops to cough again and he sighs like he's being mildly inconvenienced, "Okay— medical shock wearing off or something, I haven't lost that much blood. We're on the ground, and smoke rises. I'll be okay— alright."

“Come on,” Tommy whispers, grabbing Wilbur who makes a strangled noise at the sudden jostling. “We’re gettin’ outta this shithole. Put your shirt over your nose.”

“Tommy—” Wilbur says weakly, before basically slapping Tommy in the side of the face, he grabs him with both hands on either side of Tommy’s face.

Tommy just looks at him.

“I’m gonna be alright. You’re gonna be okay— we’re gonna be okay.”

“Wilbur—”

“Repeat it,” Wilbur says. “We’re gonna be okay.”

“We’ll be okay,” Tommy whispers.

Wilbur nods, his head slumps forwards and then he sits up a bit straighter, he doesn’t let go of Tommy, holding either side of his face. “Tommy, if something does happen? It’s not your fault.”

“Wil— nothing’s gonna happen.”

“Listen to me Thomas Underscore,” Wilbur’s voice is still raspy from all the smoke, “So many things that have happened to you— are not your fault, and this is one of them. This apartment was attacked, that’s not your fault. You’re just in the crossfire. I get really hurt? That’s not your fault, I chose—” he stops to cough and it sounds like he’s hacking up his lungs. “I chose to take the hits I did for you— I’d do it again, and that’s not your fault.”

“You’re talking like you’re dying.”

Wilbur frowns for a moment, “I’ll be fine, just— I need to tell you this.”

“How much blood have you lost?”

“I’m fine,” Wilbur says, teeth gritted, “And I need you to know that I care about you? Alright — no matter what, I will always care about you.”

“You’re talking like a dead man.”

Wilbur shakes his head, his eyes are fuzzy, not quite seeing Tommy, and not focused on anything in particular, “I’m gonna pass out, that’s fine— okay— fuck what else did we learn in that course— ah— medical shock, that’s also not good I might be going into that. But— if you need to drop me, for anything, anything at all, don’t hesitate. Drop me—”

“Wil, I’m not gonna leave you here.”

“I know,” Wilbur says, “Fuck my back hurts— uh— um—” he coughs again and it sounds like he’s hacking up his lungs. He sways to the side slightly, “Don’t have survivor’s guilt over this if I do die.”

“Why are you talkin’ like you’re dyin’, Wil?”

Wilbur looks at him for a long moment, “Just get yourself out.”

“Wilbur—”

“Promise me,” Wilbur says, “You will get yourself out, no matter what, promise me— promise me that, Thomas—”

Tommy's eyes dart back to Wilbur's his back straightening at his name.

"Fuckin' promise me. You will get out of here."

Tommy shakes his head, grabbing Wilbur who makes a strangled noise in the back of his throat. Tommy swings one of Wilbur's arms over his shoulders and Wilbur makes another noise.

"Sorry, sorry, sorry—" Tommy mumbles, holding onto his brother as he hauls them both up onto their feet.

Wilbur makes another noise, "Oh, kill me— that'll hurt less, oh my fucking Prime— fucking — ow. Fuckin' put a bullet— ow, ow, that hurts— ow—"

"I know, I know, I know, I'm sorry."

"My back," Wilbur mumbles, "My— there's shrapnel in the bone."

"What?"

"Wings. Shoulder blades—" Wilbur says, and it sounds like words are getting harder and harder and the panic starts rising. "Not—"

Then all at once Wilbur gets very heavy.

Tommy almost falls over from the weight suddenly being pushed one him, and he's not as strong as he'd like to think. He stumbles to the side, but manages to keep themselves standing.

They're okay.

They're—

Things are going to shit.

Things are very not okay.

No pressure. Only has to get Wilbur and himself out of the building.

They're not that far, but Tommy can feel the panic rising that threatens to take him whole. He knows his breathing is getting faster and he knows now is not the time, he can hear his heart thumping in his chest and—

They're gonna die.

Tommy can't do this— holy fuck he can't—

He takes a step, holding onto Wilbur.

At this point, it's less of a question of *if* he can do this, and more of that he has to. He has to — he has to do this, he—

So he starts dragging Wilbur along with him, his feet scuffing the ground as Tommy drags him, and Wilbur is a fucking dead weight by his side, and Tommy really doesn't want to check if Wilbur is breathing.

He's breathing as long as Tommy doesn't look.

And... he doesn't know what he'd do if Wilbur wasn't breathing.

What if he looked over and Wilbur's chest wasn't rising and falling? Then he wouldn't know what to do— and part of him is scared he will see that.

That he will see that Wilbur is as good as dead and—

He keeps dragging Wilbur.

His head seems to get heavier, his eyes are foggier, and he's not sure if that's the smoke or the fuzziness in his brain, he's not sure what's happening to his body if it's slowly breaking down around him.

More steps, and Tommy swears he sees the entrance area from before, with the large staircase on the side and the front desk. There's nothing here, apart from bits of paper and rubble on the ground.

Holy fuck— they've almost made it, they're almost—

Almost...

“Help!” Someone calls out.

Tommy pauses.

He grabs onto Wilbur a little bit tighter.

He looks over to the source of the voice, a small voice, and Tommy has the gut feeling that a child needs help. And— even he can't leave a kid alone, even he can't let a kid suffer alone. Even he—

Underneath the stairwell, there's three kids huddled together.

Tommy hesitates for a few moments, holding Wilbur.

He could get out and come back— he could— tell someone or—

He could get out.

Every logical part of his brain is screaming at him to run, to get the fuck out of here, to do the selfish thing and... leave.

Instead, he looks over.

He can't leave kids here, and Wilbur said to drop him— and Tommy will come back for him.

Gently, with as much care as he can, he places Wilbur against the wall, just near the entrance. He'll come back for Wilbur, or someone else will, he's just nearby and— and Wilbur would probably do the same as well.

His heart beats even louder in his throat. He can barely hear anything over his heart and the uneven thrum.

He can't fucking do this—

He can't—

“Excuse me, Mister!” One of them yells and Tommy looks over at them.

Tommy bites down his panic, he can feel the heat of fire still burning on his face and smoke seems to be clogging his lungs even more, thick black smoke is at the top of the roof, and things are breaking around them.

Bits of ceiling and wall are falling to the floor, flaking off the roof or entire sections are coming down, somewhere in the back of his mind Tommy can hear sirens and talking nearby, he can hear it all.

It’s too much.

It’s all too much and holy fuck—

Instead of bursting out into tears, Tommy gets low towards the ground, and half-walks, half-crawls towards the three kids huddled underneath the stairwell.

One of them is grabbing onto another one, who seems unimpressed about that, and the other looks the appropriate level of scaredness a child should be, they’re grabbing onto the bored child’s sleeve.

Alright then.

Tommy can do this.

He’s terrible at talking to children, and right now only three children’s lives potentially depend on him.

Fantastic.

The smoke is getting thicker though, and he knows it will start getting underneath the stairwell, and for three kids that's as good as a death sentence, and Tommy *really* doesn't want the kids to die.

He eventually reaches the three of them, still crouched to the ground, where hopefully the smoke is thinner, because he's already taken on so much smoke that his lungs are screaming at him.

It's okay.

He's alright.

Now he's going to help these kids be alright.

"Hey— uh, I'm Tommy, um— what're your names?"

"Emmie! Emmie Pratchett, I've been practising saying my full name!" One of the kids say, "And— Eden and Noid! They're not related to me! They're just my friends."

"We are not friends." One of them says, who has a seemingly bored expression always plastered on their face, and cute little round glasses that look way too big for their face.

"What's happening? Where are our parents?" Emmie asks, giving Tommy big eyes.

Tommy is vastly underqualified to handle this.

"I'm not sure buddy," he says gently, "But we're gonna have to get you out of here, alright? It's not safe in the building anymore, it's all fiery and scary."

“I don’t wanna be scared!” Emmie yells, grabbing onto another one of the kids, who seems less than thrilled about being grabbed onto.

“It’ll be fine, you big baby!” One of them says, and Tommy has never heard someone who is probably like seven call someone else a baby before, and it’s a little bit funny.

But he can’t laugh because if this stairwell falls down they’re fucked.

Emmie looks at Tommy for a moment.

Before bursting into tears, “Where’s my Mum?” She wails, throwing her head back and fucking *crying* .

She’s the youngest by far— but Prime, Tommy doesn’t want to deal with a crying child at the moment.

“Hey, hey, hey,” Tommy says in the most gentle voice he can manage, which is surprisingly difficult with the amount of smoke he’s inhaled and the way his throat feels like a cheese grater has gone down it. “We’ll find your mum, okay? First of all we need to get all of you out, because it’s a little bit scary right now, and if we stay here much longer we might get hurt.”

“I’m not afraid!” One of the other kids, not Emmie or the one who called Emmie a baby says, “There’s an adult here! Adults know what to do in scary situations.”

Tommy has literally turned seventeen today.

He is not a fucking adult.

Emmie seems to consider this for a moment, before humming at Tommy and wiping her tears away. “Noid’s right— Eden’s just being a big *meanie*. ”

“Am not!” The kid who called Emmie a big baby, and was kinda mean, says.

“Are too!”

Okay, so Emmie is the child who keeps crying and wants her mum. Eden is the child who is a little bit mean, and Noid is the child who thinks Tommy is an adult and thus will save all three of them.

Cool.

Yeah, sure—

“Alright,” Tommy says, getting the three of their attention back onto him, “We’re very close to the front door, so because Emmie is so small and has tiny legs, I’m going to pick her up. Noid and Eden, since you’re older you’re gonna need to run next to me okay? We’re gonna have to be very fast.”

“I am super fast,” Noid says.

“You are *not* ,” Eden says.

“Yes, I am!”

“Okay,” Tommy tries not to sigh.

Something around them crashes and the three of them scream, clutching onto each other. Tommy flinches as well, putting a hand on the back of his head and ducking down.

“Mr Tommy!” Emmie says, “Can we please go? My Ma and Mum will be waiting for me! I don’t want to worry them.”

The building seems to creak dangerously and Tommy feels his stomach drop.

Alright.

They need to get out *now* .

“Excellent idea Miss Emmie,” Tommy replies, looking over his shoulder at Wilbur sitting against the wall.

He’ll be back.

It’ll only be a short thing and he can grab Wilbur after and Tommy would never forgive himself if he prioritised Wilbur over three kids, Wilbur would probably never forgive him either. Rightfully so.

Tommy looks at them all, “Alright, we’re going to put our shirts over our mouths and nose like this because smoke isn’t good for us. Are we ready?”

“Yes,” Emmie says and there’s a certain strength in her expression, and Tommy nods as Emmie puts her shirt over her mouth and nose.

Tommy picks her up.

Noid and Eden also scramble to action and Tommy basically runs towards the front door, Eden and Noid on either side of him as he runs. One of them have a grip on his arm, Noid he thinks, and Eden is just sprinting beside him.

He reaches the front door, a glass door.

It's not opening.

Fuck.

Automatic fucking glass doors and their—

The panic starts rising again, oh god, they're going to die—

Without thinking, half buried in panic, he raises a foot and he kicks. Putting a hand on the back of Emmie's head in an effort to protect her from any glass spraying back at them, and try and keep her steady.

He starts kicking through the glass door like his fucking life depends on it.

It kind of does.

And it's not just his life, it's Emmie's and Noid's and Eden's and—

Noid and Eden have their arms up, protecting their faces as Tommy kicks through the glass with nothing but the pure panic that is eating him alive. His heart is going even faster, he can't fucking think—

He will not die.

After a few more panicked, sloppy kicks, that spray glass everywhere, and one shattering noise that makes Emmie squeal and bury her head further into Tommy's chest—

He bursts through the door.

Freedom.

Air.

Air— holy fuck he missed air.

Eden has a hold of the side of his shirt, as does Noid on the other side, and Emmie has her head buried against Tommy's chest and her mouth up over her nose, both of the kids do.

Tommy revels in the fresh air that surrounds him and for the first time in forever he breathes non-smoke air, and holy fuck he has missed fresh air.

He breathes for a moment, fresh air in his lungs, and he almost passes out at the relief of it, clean air—

Fuck, he missed clean air so badly.

While gasping for air, he drops Emmie.

Emmie lands on her feet and squeals, running under a tape of some kind and running into someone's open arms.

“Emmie,” she says, holding her tight, “Emmie, my darling— where’s your Mum sweetie?”

Emmie looks at the woman holding her for a moment, “Uh— she said she was following me! Then I found Eden and Noid and—” Emmie turns around in the woman’s arms, “Where is Mum?”

And Tommy looks down at Eden and Noid, who are clutching onto each other and looking around with wide eyes, Tommy looks around, hoping to get anyone’s attention, but his head spins and he can barely think.

He grabs the first adult looking person who walks past him, a medic who looks up at him with wide eyes. The medic is clearly overworked, tired, and has had a bad day and... Tommy knows the feeling.

“I have two kids with me,” Tommy says, his voice hurting so badly.

“Were you in the building?” The medic asks, “Your voice sounds awful.”

Tommy nods, “My— holy fuck, my brother is still in there— he’s—”

The medic’s eyes widen, and Tommy knows he’s being listened to.

“Shit,” they say intelligently, before looking around.

Someone walks past and the medic grabs them by the arm, Tommy’s eyes still sting, but that’s a firefighter he thinks, and Tommy fucking loves firefighters, he thinks they’re the best
—

Everyone loves firefighters.

“Huh?” They say, looking between the medic and Tommy, “What’s the issue?”

“My brother,” Tommy gasps, “My brother’s still in there— he’s by the entrance.”

The firefighter looks up, wide eyes meeting the medic’s equally wide eyes, and Tommy can see something close enough to urgency to make Tommy feel better about it, he’s being taken seriously.

“Any powers?”

“Yeah— he’s— uh can go incorporeal. He can— he can—”

And Tommy hears a crack.

Then he watches the entire front of the building collapse in on itself.

It tumbles differently to the way that Tommy thought it would, it’s more of a landslide, one thing collapses and then like a Jenga game, it all comes sliding down into a loud thump of concrete, wood and— whatever else.

Then, with a screaming realisation, Tommy realises...

He left Wilbur there.

He just watched the building collapse where he left Wilbur.

The front of the building has crumbled.

All piling up to where Tommy knows he left Wilbur.

“ *Wilbur!* ” He screams, rushing forwards, and someone grabs him around the stomach, pulling him backwards as he tries to fight against them with little success.

His head feels light.

Wilbur’s under there—

“ *Wilbur!* ” He screams again, still being held by someone he doesn’t know as his entire life falls apart.

Wilbur... Wilbur’s— he’s—

He left an unconscious Wilbur there— he—

His head spins, and he can barely focus on anything.

Wilbur’s fucking dead— he has to be and—

He finds some relief in the black spots that enter his vision, before totally taking over.

There’s relief in the way he feels his body goes limp.

Then he remembers no more.

Sometimes Wilbur thinks he's like a fucking cockroach.

He just won't fucking die.

There's been one active murder attempt on his life and like five more near-death experiences within his lifetime, and still, he's not dead— and at this point, if someone's gonna try to kill him, can they do it slightly better?

Wilbur manages to sit up a little bit.

He can't hear Tommy, he doesn't want to open his eyes to see if he's around.

He lies there.

He can't hear Tommy, with his heavy breathing or his concerned murmurings, and something inside Wilbur knows that Tommy got out, something inside of Wilbur almost relaxes at that.

Tommy's okay.

And like that, Wilbur thinks he could almost let this go. He could almost let himself just lay down, getting up is going to hurt so much— and whatever might happen hurts so badly but he doesn't want to get up.

Every single nerve ending in his body feels like it's on fire.

Wilbur's been in a lot of pain before, this is something else, he can barely think because it hurts so *fucking badly* —

He hears the roof above him creak before anything happens. And he knows, he knows that if he doesn't get up to move he's going to die. He knows the sound of a roof when it's going to fall.

Wilbur doesn't really fancy dying.

It's not on his to-do list, personally.

Wilbur manages a strangled noise that tears itself from his throat, and he manages to roll over so he's flat on his back.

Hurts, hurts, hurts, hurts—

He looks around for Tommy, and he's met with nothing. No one is here.

Tommy left him here.

Good.

He's safe.

Wilbur looks up at the parts of roof crackling above him. If he times this right, he can just phase through it, he's pretty sure he can just...

Grabbing onto the wall, he manages to haul himself onto his feet, then he starts coughing because he's a dumbass who submerged his head in smoke, he coughs and splutters for a moment, before doubling over.

He doesn't wanna die of smoke inhalation.

Personally, after a lifetime of being a superhero, dying from smoke inhalation would be really lame.

He doesn't want his death to be fucking *lame*, that's the worst thing a death can be.

Wilbur splutters again.

He hears a resounding crack.

He looks up, "Not again, you have got to be kidding me—"

If Wilbur had a dollar— every time this happened.

He goes incorporeal before he can think about it too much. And a bunch of utter shit passes over the top of him. Which is fine... things can't get like... into him while he's transparent.

Now he's about a head deep in flaming rubble.

Out of nothing but sheer, desperate panic, and the need to survive— he reaches an arm up, onto all of the rubble that is on fire around him. He can't feel the heat while incorporeal but he knows the bottoms of his shoes are hating him for this.

He reaches an arm out of the rubble, before turning that solid and grabbing onto something.

It's burning hot metal.

Wilbur screams and draws his hand away, turning it incorporeal as he looks down at the ugly blistering burn on his hand.

If he stays in here too long he'll die, more and more stuff will fall on top of him and he'll have to keep himself incorporeal for too long.

Instead... Wilbur stumbles backwards.

He falls out of the rubble, going intangible by accident and he stares down at his hand with the blister on the palm of it, the burn doesn't look nice on the other side of his hand either. He's pretty sure his hair might be singed or something.

Everything spins around him, and it feels like his throat is closing in on him.

At this point, he doesn't know if it's blood loss or smoke inhalation that'll get him.

His eyes drift shut.

He knows you're not supposed to close your eyes if you think you're dying— or even if you have a concussion but—

Tommy got out, he had to of.

And... with that, Wilbur lays on his back, staring up at the ceiling which very well might fall on top of him, and he'll probably be passed out so he can't phase through it...

He sighs a quiet thing.

Fucking smoke inhalation.

Techno's never gonna let him live this down, after it all *smoke inhalation* is what's going to get Wilbur.

And his eyelids get heavier and heavier until he barely has the energy to open them anymore.

He never thought he'd die alone, not after a lifetime of being surrounded by other people.

He hopes with nothing else that Tommy's okay. The kid deserves a happy life more than anyone Wilbur knows.

And that Techno won't be mad that this is how he died— and that he's so glad he stopped fighting with Techno. And he wants to hug Techno.

And he wants to apologise to Phil that this will be the second time he has to bury Wilbur.

And the last thing Wilbur can think of doing is grabbing the emerald brooch that Phil gave him all those years ago, the one he has matches with Techno and Phil, and now Tommy.

It's almost comforting.

He doesn't want to die alone.

No one wants to die alone, and yet here Wilbur is, with smoke in his lungs and blood pouring out of his back, there's a puddle around him, of something, and Wilbur thinks that it is blood. But he doesn't want to check.

And he's scared—

It took him so long to get to the point where he is, where there's plans for the future and things he wants to do, and things he wants to become, after teenage years that took that from him.

He doesn't want to die, he wants to live and—

And annoy his brothers and Phil and talk to Shubble and Quackity and he wants a pet cat—he's always wanted a cat but he's never had the time to care for one and—

With the little remaining energy he has, he looks at the brooch in his hand, it's laying half in his palm, with Wilbur's fingers curled over it, to try and protect it from whatever will happen to him when he passes out.

Wilbur sighs.

Tommy's okay, he's alive. Phil and Techno are fine, they're at the tower— they might hear about this later, maybe Techno will get out of patrol because of it, he probably won't though. The tower fucking sucks.

And he wants to say thank you to all of them, if he could go back in time to last night he'd grab Phil and Techno and Tommy and he'd thank them all for everything, but he can't do that —

All he can do is want.

Then the world around him fades, and Wilbur tries to fight it— he really does, he tries to move or anything and—

Nothing.

Just darkness surrounds his vision.

Nothing but that and the knowledge that he probably won't wake up.

Tommy has a dream about a penguin.

That's not really important.

It's just a nice dream.

Somewhere among it all, his eyes flicker open and he's vaguely aware that he's staring at the roof of an ambulance, with a face mask over his mouth and nose as it feels like he breathes the first clean air in a long time.

"Hey, hey," someone says gently and Tommy looks up at a blurry face, "Go back to sleep—they found your brother."

Wilbur?

Wilbur was lost?

Tommy tries to speak, to say literally anything, but instead his eyelids get too heavy and he closes his eyes.

This time he has a dream that he's failing his maths class. He hasn't been in a maths class in — a while, that's for sure, but still, he's failing a maths class and for some reason, his grade two teacher is his high school maths teacher.

And for some reason, the make-up test he's been given is about punnet squares?

"Overflow—"

"—tower attack."

"Burn injuries—"

"We need... lack of masks."

Everything is fuzzy, and Tommy stares up at what looks like a hospital roof, he is vaguely aware of being rushed through a hospital as people talk around him, he still has an oxygen mask covering his mouth and nose.

Then he has a dream about... chocolate?

It's weird.

He doesn't remember much of that dream.

He wakes up hungry though.

And disorientated, there's someone standing over his bed.

"Name?"

“Huh— wha’?” Tommy sits up, and he knows he’s in a hospital before he opens his eyes, and he tries to bite down the panic.

“I need your name, kid,” the man says again and Tommy’s head is way too fuzzy for him to even think of things like his name, “We’re identifying all the victims of the attack.”

“There was an attack?” Tommy’s words slur together into one big jumbled mess of vowels and the man with the clipboard squints at him, “Is my brother okay?”

“What’s his name?”

“Wilbur Soot,” Tommy says, and if he wasn’t so out of it, he’d find it funny he could tell this person Wilbur’s name before his own, “He’s Spectre— I assume you know that though and— is he okay?”

The man grabs a tablet from... somewhere and puts it up on the clipboard, “Sorry— we’re running a bit over capacity right now, I haven’t heard any death declarations for Wilbur Soot, if that helps.”

He types something on his tablet.

Tommy’s vision is still unfocused.

“He’s been in surgery for—” the man’s eyebrows shoot up, “Five hours.”

“I’ve been out for five hours?”

“Your notes say all your levels are normal, just sleeping— you have bad bruising around your neck, a few minor lacerations and smoke inhalation and swelling of your trachea, that should be fine though, you’ll need to be monitored for another day or so but—”

“Wilbur’s been in surgery for five hours?” Tommy whispers.

“Yup—” the man nods, “Uh— he has— a mountain of injuries and worse smoke inhalation than you, along with an... absurd amount of shrapnel in his back and rib damage seemingly from blunt force trauma. There are a lot of injuries from compression— he was found crushed underneath the rubble.”

“Will— will he be okay?” Tommy whispers.

He can’t lose Wilbur.

Not like this.

The man looks at the tablet and then up at Tommy, he opens and closes his mouth for a few moments, and Tommy feels a sinking feeling in his stomach even more. Like something’s pulling against him.

He should’ve figured out a way to grab Wilbur and the kids—

“He’s in the best place he can be, there are lots of surgeries going on right now, the apartment collapse—”

“It collapsed?”

“Partially, yes,” he says with a deep breath, “I’m a medical professional, I won’t lie to you, but he’s a hero and receiving the best care possible because of that.”

“Can... I see him when he’s out?”

A gentle expression is on the man's face, and he nods, "I'll try to transfer you to his room."

"Thank you," Tommy whispers.

The man smiles, and he walks around.

Tommy is left with his thoughts, most of them aren't really... much of anything thinkable. Mostly just a mild panic in his stomach, the concern that people are hurt—the guilt of leaving Wilbur but the relief of saving those three kids rather than Wilbur.

He feels beyond sick.

The hospital is busy around him, apparently the attack has done a number on this hospital, and there are people walking around, barking out commands to whoever will listen to them, and Tommy will listen to them.

He has nothing better to do.

He does think it's odd that... no one has come to see him, he does think it's odd that Purpled or Techno or Phil or Niki haven't asked anything, all of them knew that he was going to Wilbur's.

That makes him even more concerned. Are they all okay? Are they hurt?

The guilt and worry in his stomach doesn't subside, and he knows the heart monitor they've attached to him starts to go louder as he tries to ward off a panic attack. Things are fine. This is fine.

Everything is fine.

He's okay.

Meanwhile, completely unrelated to this.

Techno is having one of the worst days of his life.

That's before he finds out that Wilbur is on two forms of life support.

Eventually, the kind nurse from before grabs him, saying that Wilbur is out of hospital and whatever surgeries were happening are done, Wilbur apparently gets a private room, and that's a bad sign if Tommy's ever seen one.

The nurse also grabs Tommy, gently, by the shoulder and sighs slightly. "You have to know," he says, "That... it's quite bad, we're not sure if he'll make it."

"Huh?" Tommy whispers.

"He might, but there's a dangerously high chance he won't... I need you to prepare for that... he looks... rough, and that's putting it kindly. We're waiting for his family—" he looks at Tommy for a moment, "Legal family, although I know you care a lot about him. You're not supposed to be in the room first, but I think this calls for special exception. So— are you ready?"

Tommy nods.

The nurse slowly walks him down the hall into another room.

The room is the same sterile, cold room that every room in a hospital is, and the smell of the cleaning products makes Tommy wince slightly. He's never gotten used to that. He stares around it. There are two chairs, there's another bed across the room.

But Wilbur. Wilbur is on the left and swamped by a huge amount of blankets.

Tommy can only stare.

Seeing Wilbur like this, attached to more machines than Tommy knew someone could be attached to without dying is terrifying. There are IVs and heart monitors and more shit that Tommy doesn't even know what it is.

Tommy just stares at him.

Wilbur is a pale person, but this is something completely different entirely. He's just so... so fucking still, his chest is barely moving as he breathes. There's a ventilator and Tommy can't even see his full face.

It's bad.

Tommy can't even think of anything to do or say.

The nurse grabs his shoulder, "Are you okay?"

Tommy nods numbly, he can't feel his hands, and he finds himself in the chair next to Wilbur's bed, just... staring at him. It looks wrong, it's wrong that Wilbur is this still, this... not here.

It's not right.

He sits there.

He's not sure of how much time passes, he knows that the light is less in the sky and it's darker outside.

His hands are freezing.

Wilbur killed a person to save Tommy, and now he might die?

The doors swing open, and panting in the doorway stands... Techno.

His hair is a mess, there is blood on the shirt he is wearing, and Tommy has no idea if it's his own or not. Techno has a cut across the side of his face and dried blood that was clearly previously dripping from it.

Techno's knuckles are bruised and split.

He stares at Wilbur and Tommy for a long moment.

"I think I've just had like— the fourth worst day of my life," Techno says, breathing heavily, "Maybe fifth— I've had some pretty bad days."

Tommy just looks at him. "Huh?"

"The tower got attacked," Techno says breathlessly, stopping to hold onto the wall and breathe deeply for a moment, "Phil's in hospital— Daniel is as well— sections of the tower are— are destroyed."

Then Techno's eyes land on Wilbur.

His hand slaps over his mouth, and he stares at Wilbur with wide eyes, then he looks back at Tommy, his hand still over his mouth as he glances between the two of him.

Techno walks *very* fast across the room and he is beside Wilbur in a moment, staring at him and then looking at Tommy and then staring at Wilbur again. "Fuck," Techno whispers.

Wilbur is incredibly still.

Tommy might think Wilbur was dead, if it wasn't for the rise and fall of his chest, his face is pale and he barely breathes, barely moves beyond the not-so-steady rise and fall of his chest and...

Holy shit.

They almost lost Wilbur.

Techno hesitates before grabbing Wilbur's hand and looking at Tommy, there's something desperate in his eyes, something so much younger than Tommy has seen before.

And Tommy gets it.

At that moment he gets it.

Their older brother is laying in a hospital, he still might die, and all the two of them can do is stare at him with wide eyes.

“Is he— okay?” Techno asks, still grabbing onto Wilbur’s hand and staring at him like he can’t believe what he’s seeing, “What— what— happened?”

Wilbur’s just so still— Tommy can’t get used to that.

Tommy swallows, hugging his legs to his chest, he takes a deep breath. “Shrapnel in his back, I think he got a gunshot graze on the side of his head— smoke inhalation and... he was found under a slab of concrete, from what I can read from the doctor handwriting—”

Techno barely hesitates, placing Wilbur’s hand back on the bed and walking around to the end of the bed. He squints at the clipboard at the end of the bed before glancing over his shoulder.

There’s no one around to see him.

Then he picks up the clipboard, squinting at it.

“Full pneumothorax on the left side,” Techno says.

“Pneumothorax?” Tommy repeats.

Techno nods, there’s something eerily calm on his face, “Collapsed lung. Punctured lung— they’re basically the same thing in this case. Fluid gets into your lungs, combine that with the smoke inhalation and the general chest trauma.”

“He’s lucky to be alive?”

“He’s lucky they found him in a state where they thought taking him to a hospital was worth it,” Techno looks back at Wilbur again, before hanging the clipboard on the end of the bed again.

With uneven steps, Techno manages to collapse back into the chair across from Tommy, and he closes his eyes for a moment, taking a deep breath, attempting to collect himself. Then he sighs again.

“Elysium won,” Tommy whispers, “They— got the tower, they—”

“Yeah,” Techno whispers back as if talking louder will make it real. “Elysium fucking won.”

“They wanted Wilbur dead though,” Tommy says, eyes darting back to Wilbur who is laying there *so, so still* and Tommy hates it more than anything else in the world. “They haven’t gotten that.”

Techno glances at Wilbur.

There is the beep of a heart monitor, a million other tubes attached to Wilbur and Tommy doesn’t know what any of them do. Wilbur looks pale and sunken and he’s *so still* and Tommy hates it.

He hates this entire thing.

“They might still get that.”

“What?”

“Wilbur can still— well die,” Techno says, “There’s fucking holes in his lungs Tommy— and smoke inhalation and he might be brain dead, if he didn’t get oxygen for a certain amount of time— parts of his brain could have died off... it might not be our Wilbur who wakes up.”

Tommy shakes his head. “He’s okay... he has to be okay.”

Techno looks up for a moment, his eyes are glassy but he doesn't say anything, doesn't shed any tears or even look unsure of himself. "Come 'ere kid."

Tommy stands up and shuffles towards Techno.

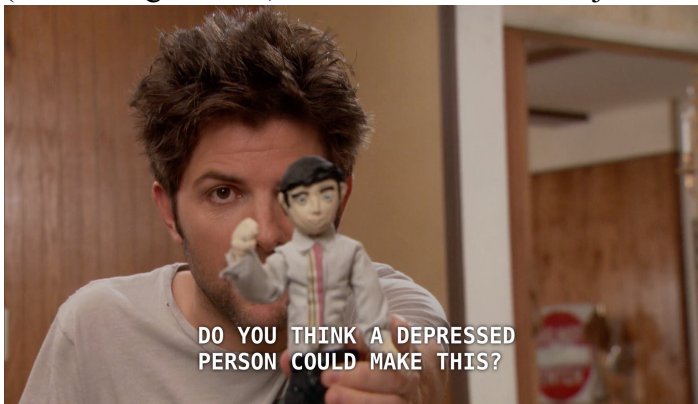
Techno pulls him into a hug, and Tommy relaxes into it.

Neither of them says anything, they barely even breathe. Just... silence.

Only the heart monitor beeps in the background.

Chapter End Notes

(me writing tinaaos, thanks Eris I stole this joke off of you)



Chapter Summary

- They go to Wilbur's, and Wilbur drops the tea that he has nightmares about Theseus to Tommy, who is unimpressed
- The boiz wake up. They badly sing Taylor Swift, because FUCK YOU THAT'S WHY
- Wilbur gets a call from Techno, because Techno is late to work and Wilbur is like "yeah i'll answer that later"
- Turns out Wilbur WILL NOT be answering that later because there's a bomb in his fucking apartment. Wilbur gets a shit tonne of metal in his back and bleeds all

over the shop.

- Tommy beats up the Elysium agents that go HELLOOOOO and pop into the room to kill Wilbur.
- Also lots of smoke inhalation. Both Tommy and Wilbur take L's as they try to get out, Wilbur passes out, Tommy saves some kids, takes them out (he left Wilbur behind to save 'em)
- BOOM APARTMENT FALLS ONTOP OF WILBUR (if i had a dollar—)
- Hospital arc. They're not sure if Wilbur's gonna wake up. Techno walks in and is like "FUCKING HELL THE TOWER GOT ATTACKED TOO I HAVE HAD A TERRIBLE TIME!"

So. That sure happened. I honestly can't think of much more to say, apart from the fact that dropping a tinaaos update without warning the Discord, or even really Twitter is a shit tonne of fun, and I am having the best time ever. Wilbur is dying, Techno just had his forth or fifth worst day (yes. i have them ranked) and we're about to see that!

Uh... yeah. **UPDATES ARE GOING TO BE SLOW**, school is wildin' and things are going... interestingly, that is one way to put it for sure.

That Time Techno Had His Fourth (or third) Worst Day

Chapter Summary

Techno's having a terrible day.

And that's before Phil and Purpled got shot.

And that's before he finds out that his brother may be dying and Tommy is also in hospital.

or, what was techno and the heroes tower doing while wilbur & tommy were dealing with elysium overtaking his apartment? we find out!

Chapter Notes

LAST TIME ON TINAAOS: Wilbur got pancaked by a building that was attacked by Elysium

THIS TIME ON TINAAOS: Techno and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day

Both Aimsey and Sniff use any/all pronouns, and Eryn uses he/they, this means the pronouns and who's talking might get confusing, I've tried proofreading to the best of my ability but I'm not an unbiased source and I know what's going on, I do have my beloved beta reader ROZY but y'know, things get past us all the time.

Warnings: guns, bombs, graphic (???) depictions of violence, discussions of death, medical talk, panic attack (it's fairly short), blood

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

This class is incredibly boring, is what Tubbo decides.

He glances up at the professor about every two minutes, writes down the relevant notes and then goes back to his computer. This is just an introductory class, Tubbo knows most of it, not all of it, but most of it.

His eyes are on the news the way they tend to be most of the time now, refreshing it every few minutes. There's news filtering through but nothing super significant.

Tubbo doesn't know why he still monitors things like he's still the 'guy in the chair' for Tommy. His eyes linger on the news more than he likes, he knows how to get into the police comms easily, he knows what words to look for on social media to keep on top of everything —

He's not that anymore, he doesn't *need* to do this anymore.

Still, the news page is open and he's refreshing it.

"Hey," the person next to Tubbo says, and Tubbo looks up from his computer to the person with shoulder-length pink hair sitting next to him in the lecture hall. Tubbo turns around to look at whoever is behind him. "No, you."

Oh.

Him.

He is being spoken to.

"Oh, yeah?" Tubbo says, "I'm— Tubbo, uh— Underscore. Tubbo Underscore."

"Guqqie Willows," they say, holding out their hand, "I use she/they pronouns."

Tubbo takes Guqqie's hand and shakes it.

Guqqie looks... a little bit older than Tubbo, not much. She also looks incredibly tired in the way that most uni students do. They have a messenger bag dumped on the table, with various pins on the front, a pride flag, Stitch from Lilo and Stitch, a flower or two or— about five flower pins. A NASA pin.

She holds her shoulders in a way that Tubbo isn't used to seeing in L'Manberg, with literally — any sort of confidence and ease. They look... at ease with the world, comforted perhaps, and that alone makes Tubbo stare.

Shoulder-length pink hair with dirty blonde roots, her hair looks well-cared for at least. She has pen and ink across her hands, along with a splash of paint, a painter then? But she also has a maths equation written on the back of her hand.

Tubbo tilts his head. Interesting.

She's not from here, is what Tubbo eventually decides. She looks too at ease, not enough trauma in her eyes to be from here. The accent also doesn't help, but it doesn't immediately rule her out.

Then Tubbo remembers he's supposed to be *having a conversation* and obviously telling them which pronouns he uses, but instead, he's just trying to read her body language like a spy gone wrong—

To be fair, he *was* a spy gone wrong, but that was beside the point.

Conversation.

“He... him, yeah that's the one, sorry I am so sleep-deprived,” Tubbo manages to stammer out eventually.

Guqqie laughs, before looking down at the styrofoam cup in her hand and shoving it in Tubbo's direction, “I haven't drunk any of that yet, I ordered the wrong thing.”

“What is it?” Tubbo squints at the cup, turning it around slightly, he is aware that he shouldn’t be taking drinks from strangers, this is perhaps one of the worst ideas he’s ever had, every part of his training says not to do that.

“Just... black coffee—”

Tubbo is chugging it before they can even finish the sentence, and Guqqie stares at him for a long moment.

“So... you’re a comp-sci major?” Guqqie asks.

Tubbo knows this, it’s the opening to an easy conversation, one that Tubbo can easily talk about. Small talk, would be what any normal person would call it. Tubbo hates small talk but he likes talking about school and learning so—

Tubbo screws up his face, “Not in uni yet, these are just— credit classes, I guess. School has always been pretty easy for me and my— guardian said I should push myself if I wanted to, but now I am here. What about you?”

“My elective course,” Guqqie says with a strained smile, “The school wants you to be *disciplined* and *multifaceted* .”

“You from here?” Tubbo asks, already knowing the answer.

“Nah, moved here for uni, it is remarkably cheap over here.”

Tubbo laughs awkwardly, “Yeah— probably the high homicide rates and the— y’know active terrorist organisation and the gangs and the— I think you get the point.”

Guccie just stares at him for a few moments, “I have got to ask— this power shit is wild, so do you have any powers?”

Tubbo taps his fingers on the desk, glancing down and then back up at her, “Apart from my tremendous ability to get myself into trouble? Nah, just— me, just Tubbo.”

“Just Tubbo?” Guccie repeats and Tubbo nods, “You seem alright.”

A moment of silence, which is more than awkward.

“Well, nice to meet you,” Tubbo says brightly, holding out his hand, “If you ever need some dodgy hacking jobs done, call me.”

“That’s... a joke right?”

Tubbo just grins at them.

Tubbo, with great delight, gets to watch as Guccie opens and closes their mouth trying to think of... literally anything and Tubbo’s grin widens at the sheer *confusion* on Guccie’s face.

He’s getting quite a bit of joy out of this.

“There’s a reason my grades are so good!”

She splutters for a bit, “Huh?”

Tubbo just smiles, patting Guccie on the shoulder. “I’ll let you figure that out.”

Guqqie opens her mouth to respond.

Tubbo's eyes dart back to his computer, just for a moment. He still has a bunch of shit open, word documents, a calculator for some reason— and of course social media and the news.

The news has updated, and Tubbo focuses his gaze a little more.

Breaking News: Apartment Collapse, Elysium Takes Responsibility

And then...

Breaking News: Three Suspected Dead Following Apartment Collapse

Tubbo stares at those two articles for much longer than he needs to.

What's the date?

Is this going to be another November 16th Apartment Collapse?

He glances down at the date in the right-hand corner of his computer.

...

Oh, fuck.

It's Tommy's birthday.

Tubbo realises that with a cold sensation in his body, it's Tommy's birthday today and Tubbo had almost forgotten. Ranboo, Tommy and Tubbo never did anything for Tommy's actual birthday.

Sometimes Tommy cried a lot on his birthdays, and Tubbo was the one who understood, Ranboo never learnt Tommy's actual birthday, the same way they never learnt why Tommy hated his birthdays or who he was before he met them.

Who can he contact? Is Tommy okay— is someone with him right now?

Tommy rightfully cut him off from anyone who could do anything right now. Purpled? Purpled probably hates Tubbo— he wouldn't be wrong to do so, Tubbo glances up at Guqqie and then down at his computer again.

Breaking News: Hero Tower Overrun By Elysium Agents

Oh.

Fuck.

Tommy would be at work today—

“Shit,” Tubbo says outloud, and he knows several people looking towards him. “Fuck, shit— I gotta go,” he looks at Guqqie, “Does anyone you know work at the heroes' tower?”

“Huh— what?”

“If they do, check on them,” Tubbo starts shoving stuff into his bag, he doesn’t even know what he *can* do, he knows that he might start panicking and he’s barely focusing on this class anyway.

His internal dialogue is incredibly intelligent at this moment, as it is consisting of: *shit, fuck, shit, fuck, shitty fuck fuck, oh shit.*

He looks over his shoulder to face most of the lecture hall, “Check the news— hero tower was attacked. Elysium overran it. *Fuck .*” He shoves more of his stuff into his bag haphazardly.

Guqqie’s face is... nothing but horror.

It’s 11am.

He needs to find out where Tommy is, he needs to find out if Purpled is safe. He needs to think of something— he might not be able to do anything, but he sure as *fuck* is not sitting in this classroom.

He shoves his stuff into his back, before throwing his backpack over his back and running down the stairs of the lecture hall and straight out the door. People shuffle behind him, also struggling to put his stuff away.

His phone is in his hand before he can stop himself.

Schlatt’s contact is up before he can stop himself.

He picks up after the third ring.

“Aren’t you in class—”

“I need you to check the hospitals for Wilbur Soot, Thomas Underscore, Daniel Greyson—Techno, Phil, any of the heroes. Check the news—”

Schlatt is quiet for a long moment, “*Why?*” He asks, “*They’ll—*”

“Everything is in fucking chaos right now, I need to know where they are— someone else will want to know. One of them will have been left out of the loop, and that’s fine— someone needs to think of the practicality of this. They might all be in different hospitals, someone— just please.”

There is a long moment of silence over the phone, Tubbo pushes through a crowd of people, making his way towards the front exit of the school.

“On it, kid,” Schlatt says.

For a moment Tubbo lets himself wonder what about him made it so that Schlatt, one of the most terrifying (former) conmen and dodgy business dealers in L’manberg grew attached to him and would do— well Tubbo’s boring work if he only asked.

Then he knows he has people he needs to track down, and his brain goes into work mode. Find the parts of the equation, fit them together later, and balance it later— that’s a terrible metaphor but Tubbo’s rolling with it anyway. Find the vague brushstrokes and fix it later.

Who was injured and where are they?

Techno’s having a terrible day.

And that's before Phil and Purpled got shot.

And *that's* before he finds out that his brother may be dying and Tommy is also in hospital.

Techno wakes up the way he does most days, then he struggles to get his prosthetic on for about fifteen minutes because there's not supposed to be any air between the sleeve and his leg and he can't get that right—

Then he trips over Floof.

Floof is fine.

He trips over Floof's tiny body and twists around because he would rather eat his prosthetic than hurt Floof. He manages to twist and land on the ground with a thump, avoiding the small fluffy body of Floof.

Then he stares at Floof.

Who at least looks guilty.

“You're supposed to bark.”

Floof barks at him.

“Not now.”

He barks again.

“We literally trained you to bark if someone’s gonna run into you.”

Techno sighs, picking Floof up and putting him on the table, looking at Floof for a moment who looks back at him.

He smiles, petting Floof’s head.

“You’re a good dog... sometimes,” he scratches underneath Floof’s chin who leans into it. “But you’re cute so I forgive you.”

The fluff ball that is Floof Floofikins seems alright with this.

“Alright, your crazy wine aunt should be here soon.”

“My name’s on the paper,” the aforementioned crazy wine aunt says, and Techno doesn’t even turn around as Niki opens the door and steps into the apartment. “Stop calling me the aunt.”

“She’s just in denial,” Techno says, scratching Floof under the chin one more time for good measure who melts underneath it. “Lookin’ after Floof?”

“I have a day off,” Niki says, “I am going to sit down, watch movies and pet Floof. Not have a single bit of nutrition in my diet, and eat potatoes in several forms.”

“Hashbrowns?”

“They’re so much effort.”

“I have some in the freezer,” Techno says, “I have patrol today, so I might be back later.”

“They already have you patrolling?” Niki asks eyebrows narrowed, she picks up Floof who seems more than comfortable curling up in her arms, “I thought you were just dragged in for the Theseus fiasco?”

“Me too,” Techno mutters, “But they always have to push a little bit harder. See a limit a little bit closer— prod a little more until something breaks.”

“That’ll be you,” Niki says gently, and Techno looks at her for a long moment. “Look I’m worried about—”

“The new recruits are choosing their mentors today,” Techno ignores whatever Niki was going to say, turning around and grabbing his bag and stuffing a water bottle in there. He should get a water bottle holder on his hero outfit because it is hard to run around and not have any water. “Well— we’re choosing them.”

“Who is there?”

“Three kids,” Techno says, “Aimsey and two others, dunno who.”

Niki stiffens up at the mention of Aimsey, and Techno doesn’t let himself show any emotion on his face about it, because Niki is running a real risk of crying over this and Techno doesn’t... he doesn’t wanna deal with that.

He’s seen Niki cry before, she’s seen him cry before, but that doesn’t mean it’s something he really wants to deal with.

Already he’s emotionally at his limit and it’s not even ten.

“Are you gonna—”

“Try mentor Aimsey?” Techno asks, looking up from his bag which now has an apple in it too, he should put a snack pocket in his hero outfit. “Of course. Her powers are similar to Tommy’s and... I’ve kinda figured those out.”

“You have not.”

“It doesn’t make sense,” Techno packs another apple into his bag, before just biting into it, apple for breakfast then, “It’s several powers, and the complete tie they have to his emotions — that’s unusual.”

Niki watches him in mild disgust as he spits apple bits out of his mouth.

Techno murmurs an apology. “Like— powers being tied to emotions is not rare, but the fact that they don’t work because of emotions? That’s weird— and just the extent of his powers is really odd— energy manipulation but only sometimes?”

With a sigh, Techno turns around and rests his forehead against the table and sighs a little bit deeper.

For a moment they’re there in silence.

“But yes, I’m going to try to mentor Aimsey. I think Sapnap is going to try get Eryn, they have similar powers and... I might mentor Sniff.”

“Why?”

“Healing powers,” Techno says, “Do you reckon I can mentor all of them? I do not trust anyone else there—”

“Wilbur, Phil?”

“Yeah, Phil mentored me and Wilbur, look how that turned out,” Techno feels a little mean for a moment before sighing a bit louder and hitting his head against the table, which makes Floof open his eyes.

“Sorry bud,” Techno says and scratches Floof’s back in an attempt to apologise for startling him, an arrangement Floof seems more than happy with.

He glances at his phone, showing the time.

“I gotta go, bye, take care of Floof!”

And so Techno... well goes.

The train is late and Techno has a lot of rage about that, so it’s overcrowded because everyone is trying to get somewhere at the same time. Apparently trains have been delayed because of the protests in Logstedchire, and then Techno feels bad about feeling angry about the delays.

They can keep delaying as long as they like, as long as people keep protesting and causing problems on purpose.

One of his earphones fall out, and Techno decides that earphone is as good as dead as it skids across the floor. He has one though, which is... always good. Better than having none, he decides.

He gets off the train about an hour later, helping some poor man struggling with getting a shopping bag up off the floor, he then grabs a spare shopping bag out of his own bag in order to try redistribute some of the weight. It works, and he gets a thank you as the man hobbles off.

After a relatively short walk, he's at the hero tower.

He's worked here for— too long.

Way, way, *way* too long.

Techno waves to one of the guards outside the building, before absent-mindedly showing his ID card. Steps into the building and shows it to someone else who looks at his face and then at his ID card.

He walks past reception, giving a wave to the reception and towards where he knows Kristin is sitting at her desk. It's in a door off from the side of the main foyer, with a big fancy brass name on it.

Techno pays the '*DO NOT ENTER*' sign without any care in the world and pushes the door open.

"Mornin' Kristin," Techno says, hitching his backpack up higher. "How's the promotion going—"

Kristin just gives him a look, "The promotion is going *fine* . Do you need anything?"

"Wow, you've changed," Techno deadpans he walks over to one of the very nice couches in her office and sits down. "One day you're a security officer, the next your the head of security and now you're—"

"I outrank you," Kristin mutters quietly, she pinches the bridge of her nose, "What do you need, Tech?"

"Oh, nothing," Techno reaches into his backpack and pulls out a box of cupcakes. "These are a joint gift from Niki and I."

“You were there for my promotion party—”

“Yeah, but cupcakes are always good,” Techno puts them on the table and slides them over towards Kristin. Kristin raises an eyebrow before opening the box and glancing at Techno suspiciously. “You need something from me.”

“I don’t.”

“If this is some sort of long-con to set me up with Phil—”

“It’s not! It’s not!” Techno shakes his head and pushes the box forward a little bit, “I’ll leave Wilbur to that, I just wanted to do something nice for you—”

There’s a knock at the door.

Kristin looks at Techno, “Were you expecting anyone? Who is it?”

“Me,” comes Phil’s voice through the other side of the door, “Can I come in?”

“Sure, your kid’s already here.”

The door swings open and Phil steps into the room, he looks at Techno, then at the cupcakes on the desk and immediately goes for the cupcakes.

Kristin picks them up, swinging them out of the way, she raises an eyebrow at Phil, who almost has the audacity to look guilty. “Do these look like yours?”

“Well,” Phil claps his hands together, “Nope. Can I have one?”

Kristin sighs, sliding the box back to the other side of the desk, Techno grabs one and hands it up for Phil, Techno grabs one for himself because he deserves it.

It’s quiet as both Phil and Techno eat their cupcakes.

“Do either of you need anything?” Kristin asks, tiredly, “I appreciate the visits, I really do, but I have work to do.”

“Anything I can help with?” Phil asks, mouth partially full with a cupcake.

“Yeah, actually,” Kristin turns a paper around before pushing it in Phil’s direction, “So there’s a charity event here in a month, and I have to organise the security, would I be better off with my more experienced security at the front entrance or in the actual event?”

“At the door,” Phil says.

At the same time, Techno says, “In the event.”

Kristin sighs. “I think I agree with Techno, if something happens at the door I don’t want all of my best to be taken out by it— of course, there’s gonna be both at both, it’s just a matter of how I skew it.”

“Yeah, in the event then,” Phil says, “You’re the head of security not us. That sounds good.”

“You respect me too much Phil,” Kristin murmurs, she picks up a cupcake and takes a giant bite out of it, “Means you agree with everything I say.”

“I don’t agree with everything you say,” Phil grabs another cupcake and Kristin lets him take it, she offers the box to Techno and Techno shakes his head. “You know more about this than I do, so I trust your judgement on it. The same way I’d hope you trust my judgement on— battle tactics or flying.”

Kristin tilts her head at him, a fond smile on her face.

Techno decides that he should probably dip, “Well, enjoy the cupcakes, I have a mentorship meeting to get to.”

“I’ll go with,” Phil says, he drops the cupcake wrappers into the bin by Kristin’s desk and wipes his hands on his pants, sending crumbs scattering onto the floor. “Oh yeah, call your brother, he’s not here yet.”

“He’s not planning on mentoring though,” Techno gives Kristin a wave before pushing the door open, and Phil follows him over to the elevator. “I thought he literally can’t anymore— after Fundy. Wasn’t he excused from the meeting?”

Phil presses the button on the elevator, “Yeah, but he should still be here. Most of them have no intents on mentoring but they’re still there. Just call him.”

Techno rolls his eyes, grabbing his phone out of his pocket.

The phone rings a few times, before Wilbur kindly picks it up.

“You already are late,” Techno says.

“Techno, c’mon it’s Tommy, I’m not just gonna kick him out— we’ll eat and get ready and then we’ll leave. It’ll be like... twenty minutes or so, then travel which will be a bit longer but — c’mon.”

“It’s still your job,” Techno returns, side-eyeing Phil who looks a mixture of disappointed and not surprised.

“I’ve had my job for like eleven years,” Wilbur returns... which is an excellent point, “I’ve been later for less, I’ll make it there in time for our patrol, don’t worry lil’ bro—”

“I’ll kill you.”

“Lil’ bro,” There’s a grin in Wilbur’s voice, which is very evident. Techno sighs dramatically. *“I will be there for our patrol, just like old times. Just— lemme have a big longer with Tommy, it’ll be like forty minutes. Please?”*

Techno can’t say no to Wilbur, not really, “Okay, I’ll cover for you. If anyone asks uh— I dunno play your trauma card.”

“Got it, I had a terrible panic attack.”

“You are a terrible influence on me.”

“I’m not the one who tried to shoot a president. If I recount correctly you’re the bad influence.”

This is one of those things which is not worth arguing, while the statement is correct, on paper, Wilbur’s just saying it to be difficult as fuck. “Alright, bye, love you.”

“Bye,” Wilbur says, “See you soon.”

Techno hangs up, looking at Phil as the elevator doors slide open, “He’ll be about half an hour. He doesn’t want to kick Tommy out and Tommy’s not back at work for a few more days still so—”

“You don’t have to cover for him,” Phil steps out of the elevator.

They turn a corner together, approaching the open arch that leads into the all-too-familiar training room. With the floor of bright yellow mats.

“Yeah, but I’m gonna anyway.”

In the training room is just about— everyone apart from Wilbur. Most of the heroes are here, and Techno assumes the ones that aren’t are on patrol. They’re standing around talking casually.

However, what actually catches Techno’s attention are the people leaning against the back corner of the room. Techno assumes those to be the new trainees, Techno only knows Aimsey by name.

Next to Aimsey are two others.

One is taller than the other two, with two small horns that peek out of curly blonde hair that’s darker at the roots. They have their arms crossed and are watching the room carefully like they’re eyeing any threats.

On the other side of Aimsey is another— child, they look a lot younger, with dark hair that’s held back by a bandana. Even from over here, Techno can see that they have one red eye and one... not red eye.

“Aimsey, Eryn and Sniff,” Phil supplies, watching Techno observing them all. “Eryn’s the one with the bandana and Sniff’s the one with the horns.”

Techno glances at Aimsey, they don’t seem hurt at all, she’s actually laughing with Eryn, slapping him in the arm. He looks tired, but apart from that he looks okay, which is more than

Techno was expecting.

He sighs in relief, looking back at Phil. “Planning on mentoring?”

“Nope,” Phil responds, “Had too much fun with you, Wil and— Quackity!”

Quackity walks up to them, smiling slightly, “Philza— Technoblade.”

“That is not either of our names,” Techno responds without even thinking, sometimes he forgot that he basically grew up with Quackity in a similar way he did with Wilbur. Sometimes he forgets how easy falling back into their old bickering is.

And sometimes he forgets just how punchable Quackity is, in the most affectionate way he can manage.

Quackity just bows, ever the dramatic, “Mornin’ Tech, where’s your brother?”

“Running late,” Techno responds, “I’ve been told to tell everyone he had a terrible panic attack—”

“What?” Phil asks, head snapping towards Techno straight away.

“He didn’t— as far as he told me, but he’s a terrible, awful, bad influence,” Techno says, he swings an arm around Quackity’s shoulders and Quackity scowls at him but doesn’t break himself free. “Floof isn’t here today.”

Quackity just scowls at him.

Techno pats Quackity on the head a few times, before grabbing his beanie and moving it backwards and forwards to ruffle Quackity's hair. Quackity squawks, not unlike a bird, and moves away from Techno.

"Boys," Phil says tiredly, "I really thought this would stop when you turned eighteen."

"Now why would you think that—"

"Okay," Phil eventually speaks up and the room falls quiet, even the kids on the other side of the room go quiet, "We all know what happened last time—"

Techno snorts.

Fundy's mentorship process was a whole thing, it was a three-hour meeting discussing everyone's strengths and weaknesses regarding taking someone under their wing. By the end, it was just a fight between Quackity and Wilbur, and everyone else had to watch. It wasn't the duller meeting Techno had ever been in, but it was one of them.

Everyone was super excited as it had been years since they had a new hero recruit, that excitement seemed a bit quieter now. It seems like everyone is done with this entire thing, heroes.

Techno files that away in the back of his brain.

"Okay," Phil steps forwards, the apparent leader of this thing— that means that if Sam isn't trying to take charge of this...

He wants to mentor one of them.

For fuck's sake.

“Could you please move closer to the middle of the room?” Phil asks, and the three of them do that. “Okay, Aimsey is the one with the beanie, what pronouns do you use, Aimsey?”

“Any.”

“Alright— Sniff, could you please introduce yourself?”

“You kinda... just did,” Sniff says screwing up their nose before shaking their head, “Uh—I’m Sniff. I am... here. I have... healing powers, kinda.”

That makes Techno stand up a little bit straighter.

“I use any pronouns, same as Aimsey. Did it before them though, they’re a copycat.”

“I didn’t know you until a week ago!”

“Copycat, I swear,” Sniff says.

Techno likes them.

“And I’m Eryn,” Eryn adds, “So Phil doesn’t have to awkwardly try to make me talk. I use he/they pronouns and— uh, I control fire. That’s fun.”

“Telekinesis,” Aimsey adds, looking around the group. “That’s my power, like Theseus except for the fact our powers look incredibly different, and probably on a technical level work very differently.”

A long moment of silence across the room, and Techno tilts his head at Aimsey.

Aimsey meets his eyes.

Looks like Techno's mentoring this kid.

"Can we see your powers?" Skeppy says, looking directly at Sniff, and Sniff seems to fold down a little on herself. "If you have weird freaky stuff like that one," Skeppy kinda tilts his head towards Techno. "I'd like to see it."

"I'm not really comfortable with—"

"And that's okay," Techno says and finds himself needing it. He's already protective over these kids— he's as good as gone when he actually speaks to them. "You never have to show your powers if you don't want to, we do have healers here, and I'm sure Skeppy would be a willing participant."

"Sure," Skeppy says with a lazy thumbs up.

Sniff doesn't look sure.

"You really don't have to," Techno says, "I didn't show anyone who wasn't Phil my powers for months."

Sniff looks at Skeppy, then at Techno, then back at Skeppy. "Sure you're okay with this?"

Skeppy nods, "Bring it on."

Sniff gets into more of a fighting stance, one leg slightly forwards, both hands up in front of them. Both of their hands are protecting both their head and chest from the position, Techno tilts his head slightly.

They're obviously incredibly competent.

The thing that takes Techno is that— that's a fighting ring stance. With one leg slightly ahead, protecting the head and chest. Sniff's stance is almost a showman's stance for a fight, which makes sense because that's how they were taught.

Techno was taught to make a show out of a fight.

Sniff seems to be doing the same thing, without even realising it.

Techno glances at Phil. Phil seems to have the same look in his eyes that Techno does.

Alright. The chances Sniff is a ring kid are— a lot higher than Techno is necessarily comfortable with, he doesn't need fighting ring shit following him here.

Sniff takes a deep breath, the entire room is filled with tension. Sniff's eyes are on Skeppy.

Then they tilt their head, putting their hands out in front of them.

Their fingers jut out in odd positions and they turn their hands to the side, a smile widening on their face as their hands start shaking from what must be the sheer effort of it all. Then the tremors move up and their arms are shaking too.

Skeppy cries out in pain.

There's a snap.

He hits the floor.

“Oh, fuck,” Sniff mutters, “That was more pressure than I meant—” she rushes forwards towards him.

Techno's thoughts are at a lot of places at the moment, concern for *how powerful* this kid is, only mild concern for Skeppy— he'll be fine, he basically asked for it. And he is more than aware of the way that Sam's eyebrow raises.

“Well, shit,” Phil says, he glances at Techno.

They're really getting some overpowered kids here.

Where have they been hiding for eighteen years?

Sniff is murmuring apologies as she manipulates Skeppy's bones back into place, with Skeppy crying out because that can not be comfortable at all. “You're fine, you're fine, you're fine,” Sniff repeats.

Techno looks back at Phil, and Phil has a pained expression on his face.

Everyone looks at Aimsey next, Aimsey has their arms crossed, staring straight ahead as people's eyes snap to them. He glances at Techno, raising an eyebrow.

‘*My go?*’ Aimsey's eyes seem to ask.

Techno glances around, Skeppy is being carted upwards, and he half laughs to himself as he is being dragged off to the healers. Phil is watching him, Sam is watching Sniff, Aimsey and Eryn. Shubble is watching him, Quackity isn't watching anything, with his eyes on the ground.

And instead, Techno tilts his head to the side, smiling slightly.

Aimsey gives a nod, before turning back around.

“What would you like me to do?” Aimsey asks, tilting their head.

There's a certain fire in her eyes as she says that, eyes set on Sam. Aimsey is smiling slightly.

“Anything,” Sam responds, flatly.

“Anything?”

Sam nods.

Techno immediately knows that's a mistake.

Aimsey grins, they put both hands out in front of them, fists clenched.

The power that leaves Aimsey's hands are like red vines, so unlike the sparks that Techno is used to seeing with Tommy. It swirls around itself slowly moving upwards as it curls up into the ceiling.

As all the tendrils expand outwards from Aimsey, they look up, making eye contact with Sam.

Then they bring both hands in.

Sam goes flying across the room, in a way that is beyond beautiful.

Techno doesn't even bother to hide his biting laughter, he doubles over, clutching his stomach as Sam looks the *most* offended that someone has ever looked in their life. Techno laughs even harder, to the point he needs to reach out and grab Quackity to keep himself standing.

Quackity gives him a look that says *'you are going to be in so much trouble for this.'*

Techno in response, laughs even harder, "Henry," Techno says, eyes glancing up at the ceiling. "Please back that video up on every server you have, and also send it to me— I can not forget that anytime soon."

Sam glares at him as he picks himself up from the floor.

But once again Techno does not give a single shit because realistically what's Sam gonna do? Cry about it to William Nelson-Jones?

"Eryn?" Sam offers, brushing invisible dust off his clothes.

Techno has managed to suppress his laughter a *little* but the glorious image of seeing Sam flying through the room will ne

"Uh— I'm not very good," Eryn says, he steps forward. There's nothing tension-building about it, not in the way that Aimsey's and Sniff's displays of powers have been.

Techno is curious though, fire control is not a rare power. Most powers like this are in a small amount. Lots of people can manipulate water to a very small degree, or fire— and now

Techno wants to see what level of controlling fire got Eryn to the place he is standing in now.

Eryn claps his hands together.

A long column of fire shoots out of the ground, spiralling into the space and Techno feels the heat on his face.

Eryn just shrugs, “Uh— so that.”

“Was one of the most impressive displays of fire I have seen in literal decades,” is what Phil says instead. “Alright, you have the run down— I will try and make this quicker than last time— who would be willing to mentor Aimsey?” Phil says.

“Me,” Techno says with his arms crossed.

“Me too,” Sam replies across the room.

Oh.

Fucking fantastic.

The one person who could probably stop Techno from mentoring Aimsey, and the one person Techno can’t just brute force through— well he could, literally, but Techno has decided he’s a pacifist.

He hates being a pacifist right about now.

He would quite like to punch Sam in the face.

Very hard too.

“Isn’t it a policy that people from the same districts can’t mentor each other?” Sam says.

Techno looks at him for a moment. “Motherfucker, you’re from Logstedchire. And we all know that rule was explicitly made because they didn’t want me mentoring people and ‘radicalising’ them, or making sure they have any good traits like— sticking up for themselves.”

Sam... appears to have not thought that through.

Techno almost goes to insult Sam again, instead, he decides it’s best for everyone if he moves on.

“I’m the only one who has even the slightest experience with a powerset similar to Aimsey’s,” Techno’s arms are still firmly crossed and he wishes looks could kill because Sam would be dead on the ground right now.

A moment of silence.

No one seems to want to address the elephant in the room.

Why Techno knows about powers like Aimsey’s.

“Oh?” Sam replies, his voice smooth and Techno would like to slap him in the face, “You mean when you betray the tower to work with Theseus?”

If he’s trying to shame Techno, he has played the wrong game.

Techno has not felt shame since he watched Wilbur try to flirt with a rubbish bin while wasted. If Wilbur Soot does not feel shame over that, Techno is not going to feel shame about being called out as the only one who would help a clearly mentally unstable kid.

A moment of silence.

“Yeah,” Techno deadpans, “That is literally why, you’re trying to play some game here, but I’m not playing. Imagine the threat Theseus could have been if he had no reason to stop himself from attacking the heroes.”

The silence after that feels somehow heavier, and Techno revels in that.

It’s a thing that’s been in the back of his brain for a long time, if Tommy was a threat to the heroes *now* what could it have been before? What would it have been if Techno didn’t reach out to him? Is there a version of this world where Tommy is the one trying to kill them all?

Sam clears his throat, and immediately Techno is annoyed.

Attack him!

Ah. There’s Chat.

It’s been— so fucking long since they decided to intervene in something.

Kill.

Punch really hard mayhaps?

Boom. Boom. Pow!

Isn't that from a song?

He wishes Tommy was here.

He tends to calm down Chat.

“No, Chat,” Techno whispers, and Phil raises an eyebrow at him, then he decides to raise his voice. “We’re not going to attack Sam, that’s a waste of our energy.”

Sam doesn’t *look* nervous.

Techno knows better.

“Let Aimsey decide,” Quackity says.

Techno has never been more grateful for Quackity than he has at this moment, and Techno is probably going to buy him a box of chocolates or something.

Judging by the glance Quackity gives him, he knows what Techno’s trying to do.

Thank fuck for Wilbur’s friends.

“That would probably be smart,” Shelby says and Techno is so glad Wilbur made friends here because he sure as fuck did not. “Since this is— y’know Aimsey’s life, let’s not take another decision away from them.”

Aimsey smiles at her, and Shelby smiles back.

“Yeah,” Techno says, and he’s not going to be humble about this victory, “Remember what happened last time you tried to disallow a trainee from choosing their mentor? Or forcing them to go with a mentor they didn’t want to?”

Sam frowns at him.

“Still have the scar?” Techno asks, amusement on his expression and he’s not even going to hide it, “On your hand right? You tried to grab my shoulder and I drove a knife through your hand?”

“I remember it.”

“Do you want a matching one?” Techno replies with a smile.

The silence is steady, and Techno is glad that he’s making just about every single person in the room uncomfortable.

Not Aimsey though, Aimsey is grinning like a kid on their birthday.

“Can I drive a knife through someone’s hand?” Aimsey asks, looking back and forth nervously, and then his eyes land on Techno.

Techno looks at xem for a moment. “If someone tries to grab you and hasn’t asked, fucking drive a knife through their hand.” His eyes flicker to Sam and he smiles even more, “Twist it as well.”

“Yeah, I want Techno,” Aimsey says, raising their hand in the air and someone snorts at that, “And it would also be nice if Sniff and Eryn could have choices as well, since— well, y’know they’re also recruits.”

“You’re right,” Techno says, and he’s not sure when he got the confidence to be saying half the things he’s saying, “Sniff, Eryn, who do you wanna be mentored by?”

Eryn and Sniff glance at each other nervously.

“Well, uh—” Sniff looks around for a moment, before glancing at Techno and then at Shelby, “Does anyone here actually have healing powers? Because I know Whirlpool’s powers are cool but... it’s not healing.”

Everyone looks at Techno.

Techno fights the urge to scream.

“I used to be a healer— kinda,” Techno hesitates for a moment, “I did more reverse healing, have you seen Avatar the Last Airbender?”

“Oh, I love Avatar,” Sniff says excitedly, their face lighting up, they look back and forth before looking at Techno, “Zuko has one of the best character arcs in all of media, and I love Zuko he shows that healing isn’t linear and— I am rambling.”

Techno snorts, “You’re right about all of that, but Katara and blood-bending?”

Something seems to click in Sniff’s eyes and they nod.

“That,” Techno says, “I could do that. Then I got drugs stabbed into me and I can’t do that anymore. So— I can probably teach you how to explode someone.”

Sniff goes quiet. “I’m not really in the business to learn how to explode someone.”

“You can’t take in another trainee,” Sam adds, ever the spiteful bitch, “Either Sniff or Aimsey ___”

“Two people can mentor one person,” Phil says, finally stepping forwards.

Apparently, he thinks *now* is the time Techno needs backup, rather than whatever was happening beforehand.

Techno almost wants to shut him up and lead this not-so-subtle dragging of Sam, but instead, it’s probably smart if Phil does because he’s had a lot longer dealing with Sam than Techno ever has.

Phil frowns for a moment, looking at Sam, and it looks like neither of them are going to back down, “In fact, it would be a disservice to Sniff if we did not allow him to train with one of the only other people in this building who could help her understand her powers.”

Sniff gives a smile at that.

Techno decides now isn’t the time to mention he’s not much for healing, he only learnt how to heal the small things, and honestly, he thinks the way he wielded his healing powers was pretty useless power and he’s glad he has strength now.

Part of him is curious if he can heal even a little bit, even if it’s a paper cut or something small.

“Wilbur and Techno both did not have two-person mentorships.”

“Yeah, and look at how we fuckin’ turned out,” Techno snaps, ignoring the way that Phil looks both proud and upset with himself at the same time, “Look— yeah I’m not Phil, I can’t mentor multiple kids at once but... I can half mentor them unless you’re going to put Sniff with the healers which are, what I assume, a huge disservice to their abilities, I’m assuming

the fact that they're here rather than in medical school means their powers are more similar to mine than healers."

Sniff raises her hand. "I'm more interested in the healing."

"And that's fine," Techno says, still looking at Sam, "Healing is important and we wouldn't be anywhere without our healers, but you will be expected to at least partly use your powers to hurt other people."

Sniff winces.

"I know," Techno says, "It's shitty— but it's part of the job. I can help you learn how to control it, maybe you can spend more time with the healers, they're always looking for ways to speed up healing bone."

Sniff smiles a little bit at that, "Well," they say, "I think you and Whirlpool would be nice— co-mentoring, that sorta thing... if that's alright with you two?"

"More than okay with me," Techno says.

Shubble looks at Techno, before glancing back at Sniff, "That sounds good."

Sniff looks down at the ground.

"Eryn?" Phil asks, and Eryn jumps at being addressed, "What about you?"

"Well the obvious choice is Sapnap..." Eryn says slowly, he looks at Sapnap who is watching him intently. "Similar powers, similar skillsets—"

“That’s not the same question,” Phil says, “The question isn’t who has the most similar powers, it’s who you’d like to mentor you. Who do you want to mentor you?”

“Quackity,” Eryn says.

Techno gets to watch the glorious sight of Quackity spitting out all of his water onto the mat that he’s standing on. He turns around and looks at Eryn with wide eyes, before pointing at himself.

“Me?” Quackity says.

“Yeah,” Eryn says quietly, their eyes dart to Sapnap and then away again. “You were sticking up for us, that’s the sorta person I want mentorin’ me. Since Whirlpool and The Blade were taken—”

“Ah, I see how it is,” Quackity says but there is a grin in his voice. “I was the last choice?”

“Easily,” Eryn responds in a similar deadpanned tone. “The other two are both a lot cooler than you.”

“That’s not hard, I’m unironically terrified of a dog.”

There’s a long moment of silence around the room, and Techno feels everyone’s eyes on him again. He looks around at all of them, “Well— if that’s all. Are we done? Quackity, Shubble and I have a shit tonne of paperwork to do now.”

No one disagrees.

So Techno grabs both Shubble and Quackity by the arm.

He drags the pair of them straight out of there, ignoring anything that's yelled after them as they walk out of the room.

He then drags Shubble and Quackity into the elevator.

The three of them stand there.

Techno turns to look at them all, his back is to the door— which feels incredibly odd, but he needs these two to understand. “Alright. You need to accept that you will be emotionally attached to that kid.”

They both look at each other, then at Techno and nods.

“I have experience with mentoring a superpowered kid before,” Techno explains and recognition crosses both of their faces. “You need to know that— you can't keep them safe from everything, there will be bad days, they might hate you some days— but it's your job to take care of them and keep them as safe as you can.”

Quackity tilts his head slightly.

Shubble nods, there's something firm in her vision.

Techno glances at Shubble, “Since we're co-mentoring— I think Sniff is a fighting ring kid, I'm not sure but the fighting stance was right.”

Shubble frowns, “That's... not good.”

“I'd fuckin' say, so there might be uh— some trauma around there.”

“Alright... what do I have to be careful of?”

And someone’s listening. Techno’s shoulders relax before he can think of it, and he lets out a sigh of relief. They’re listening to him— he’s not an expert on taking care of kids but he’s being listened to at least.

Techno takes a deep breath, “Uh— I’m bad underground. Remember Sniff is a very different person than me. They also don’t seem to like showing their powers so be careful about that, and be adamant that they don’t have to use their powers if they don’t want to.”

“Anything else, I mean— you’re the only one with even slightly shared life experiences,” Shelby shuffles on her feet, “You don’t need to tell me anything if you don’t want but... yeah.”

“I get it,” Techno takes a deep breath, “Just don’t— bark orders at her, if that makes sense.”

“Perfect sense,” Shubble responds quietly, “And Techno, for what it’s worth— I’m sorry that happened to you.”

“It was a long time ago.”

“That doesn’t make it okay,” she responds, she takes a deep breath, “I think we’re out of our depth here.”

“Oh, for sure,” Quackity says, he’s leaning against the wall of the elevator slightly, “But— most people are, and if no one’s gonna actively look after them... well, we might as well. We might fuck it up, but I think fucking it up is better than not trying.”

Shelby nods, slowly.

Techno sighs, “We should start a support group.”

The elevator door opens and Shubble steps out, “I know you’re joking about that, but I think it’s an excellent idea. How about... my floor on— Wednesday lunches, none of us work then.”

Quackity and Techno glance at each other.

“Sounds good,” Quackity says.

He waves as the elevator doors shut.

“They’re getting older,” Quackity says, Techno just glances at him screwing up his face. “The heroes they recruit— I mean— I know the bar is low but Sniff and Aimsey are legally adults.”

“And Eryn?” Techno responds dryly.

“Phil was ten,” Quackity responds, he shoves his hands into his pockets. “I dunno— they recruited us young so we didn’t ask questions... why are they recruiting three kids from Logstedchire now?”

“I don’t know...”

Quackity has a point, these three seem like a big risk compared to the last hero they took on — Fundy. But at the same time taking Techno on as a hero was a far larger risk— although he’s pretty sure that Aimsey has a criminal record—

The elevator door opens.

The pair of them step out and start walking.

“Eh,” Quackity shrugs uselessly, “Something to keep in mind, I guess.”

Techno is quite proud of his instincts.

It’s something that he hasn’t had trained out of him, no matter the amount of training the heroes tried to instil in him, to ignore that gut feeling and suppress that gut reaction. His instincts are still there and strong as ever.

And Techno knows the people who are allowed to grab him without any forewarning.

The list includes: Wilbur, Phil, Tommy, Purpled, Niki, Quackity, Shelby and once upon of time it included TapL and Fruit and Squid— it does not include that last subsection anymore.

So when a hand wraps around his arm, Techno does not hesitate to whirl around and grab the knife from his side and go to slam it down into the arm of whoever grabbed him.

He stops the knife just before he stabs Sam’s hand.

Quackity’s eyes go wide and he glances between the pair of them.

“Sam,” Techno grits out, “I’d suggest you let go before I stab through your hand and jam the knife into the wall.”

Sam, indeed lets go.

Quackity stays in his spot, which is much braver than what Wilbur would have done, Wilbur probably would’ve run away. Techno’s glad that Quackity is here— that is not a sentence he ever thought he’d think.

Techno tilts his head, “The fuck do you want, Sam?”

Sam scowls at him, “You shouldn’t have Aimsey undermining me like that. And you should be careful about creating a mini-you.”

“Aimsey won’t be a mini-me,” Techno snaps, “Aimsey will be himself— we have one trait in common and that’s—”

Hating you?

That is what he probably can’t say without getting Aimsey fired, Techno has a level of protection within the tower that he’s taken for granted for a long time. He forgets that not everyone can walk around with an air of general arrogance and like he’s better than everyone here.

And he’s not necessarily better than everyone here.

He is better than Sam though.

He will say that with no hesitation.

It’s not even being arrogant, that’s just factually correct.

“Being able to stick up for ourselves,” Techno eventually says, Quackity lets out a long whistle next to him, immediately breaking any sort of tension that there might have been. “If that is all?”

Sam doesn’t say anything.

Quackity grabs Techno's arm and starts to walk the two of them off.

Sam clears his throat, now that he's out of Techno's hitting range. Coward.

"I'd be careful," Sam says.

Techno stops in his tracks.

Quackity's grip on Techno's arm loosens.

He whirls around to look at Sam, "What the fuck do I have to be careful of?"

"You have lots of people you care about," Sam tilts his head at him, "And a brother who only gets wings if I say he does."

Techno grits his teeth, "You've had those prototypes for five years and haven't given them to him, I don't think they work. I think they're something else to hold over Wilbur's head— as if he isn't the perfect hero. He's done everything right—"

"Has he?" Sam questions.

"He has done everything asked of him and more," Techno grits out, "He's a better hero, and a better person than you will ever be. Say one more thing against Wilbur and I will finally figure out the extent of my strength powers."

The anger that rises is the— angriest Techno has been in a long time. That's something he can notice in the back of his head as his blood starts burning. His entire body feels warm like there's a fire in his blood right now.

He will fucking kill Sam.

Quackity's grip on his arm tightens.

Techno barely feels it, but he looks down at Quackity.

Quackity is looking at him with a *'please not now'* expression that does nothing to calm Techno's seething anger, but it does something because he isn't so sure he'll murder Sam anymore.

"You have more brothers than Wilbur," Sam says with a sickening smile. "It would do you well to remember that too— especially after you've done so much to keep him safe."

He knows about Tommy.

Sam knows about Tommy and that he is Theseus.

Which is— perhaps the worst thing for Tommy's safety right now.

Techno shakes Quackity's grip off his arm, "Alright, you motherfucker— let's fucking do this right now—"

Quackity grabs his arm again, Techno knows he could shake Quackity off without barely moving his arm, he also knows that Quackity is being a lot more rational at the moment, and Techno would be smart to listen to him.

He almost— snarls, before realising that's probably not the move and instead he just grinds his teeth together. His dentist will not be a fan. His imaginary lawyer will be very thankful he didn't kill Sam on the spot.

Quackity just looks at him, “Come on, Techno.”

Techno grinds his teeth a little bit more. “One day,” Techno promises, finding his voice frightening low, “You will be so ruined I won’t even need to hit you— I’m better than that, I might hurt my hand on your dense fucking skull.”

Sam just watches him, Techno doesn’t back down.

“You’re from Logstedchire,” Techno hisses, “And yet you insist on dragging it down to rise to the top. Do you think you’re worth anything to the committee? Do you think you’re nothing beyond a piece in their game? You think you’ll take over from good ol’ Nelson-Jones when he inevitably kicks the bucket?”

Sam keeps that same indifferent stare, and Techno hates him so much for it. He hates Sam so much, he didn’t think he could hate someone as much as he hates Sam.

“You won’t,” Techno hisses, “Because you’re one of us— the heroes— from Logstedchire, and we’ll never be worth anything to this system apart from canon fodder that lived too fucking long.”

Sam leaves.

Techno lets out a deep breath.

Quackity raises an eyebrow. “Dude. What the fuck—”

“Just... don’t.”

“Good rant,” Quackity says, he grabs Techno’s arm again and starts pulling him towards the SBI floor.

Techno lets himself get dragged.

They reach the floor with no one else grabbing them, but Techno feels more than on edge the entire time. It feels like something thrumming in the front of his chest, nerves— anxiety, rage, a combination of all three.

Somehow Chat has managed to keep itself quiet, Techno feels proud.

Techno's hands are shaking slightly, but he knows he's not scared at all. It's odd... to be in a state like this, and it feels like years since he was last like this. Quackity seems to know that something is up, but he doesn't say anything as Techno moves forwards in the room.

Everything is just about how it was when Techno left last night, but now it has the added company of both Fundy and Purpled. Purpled is leaning against the couch, flicking through a book absent-mindedly, while Fundy appears to be watching something on the TV. Which is something he should not be doing at all, considering the cost of the TV and how they're only supposed to have the news on that TV for a reason.

Techno steps into the room, and Purpled's eyes immediately dart up to look at him.

"Hello," Purpled says, then looks back down at his book. "How'd the meeting go?"

"We're both mentors now!" Quackity says happily, he pushes past Techno and flops onto the couch between Fundy and Purpled, he leans towards Purpled and Purpled pushes his head away. "Praying that we don't completely fuck this up but... y'know."

"I do not," Purpled says, he looks up at Techno again. "You'll be good at it."

"And I won't?" Quackity sounds outraged, but everyone can see the smile on his face as he dramatically flops so he's leaning against Fundy. "I'll be a great mentor, how dare you imply otherwise."

Purpled sighs exasperatedly.

Quackity laughs to himself, turning his body so he's looking at Fundy. "Fundy, you were mentored recently, what do you wish Wilbur knew before training you up?"

Fundy squints at him, "Uh— I dunno, Wilbur was pretty good."

"You don't have to be diplomatic because Techno's here," Purpled is now looking down at his book again, he flicks the page. "Techno will also benefit from knowing this."

"Uh," Fundy glances around nervously, "I guess that... trainees don't have the same level of respect from just about any of the workers, which is... y'know, a thing. So they won't get away with the stuff you lot can get away with, especially you, Techno. And anything the hero does which is bad eventually comes back to bite the trainee."

"How?" Quackity asks he meets Techno's eye and Techno nods, "Phil fucked up a lot and kept us pretty safe."

Fundy looks down at the ground, "I dunno. Wilbur would fuck up on one mission and then I would be dragged in and berated. It's a really weird way of doing it, it might be because I'm new. I don't really know."

Techno frowns.

He knows that Phil has more protections than the average hero, and Techno has never pushed to ask why. He wants to quite badly, but he's never asked why Phil took it upon himself to keep a bunch of the younger heroes safe from the committee, even the heroes he wasn't

training. All of them seemed to be safer and had fewer consequences when Phil got involved. Techno knows there has to be a reason for that but... he doesn't really know why.

Techno can, however, assume that Quackity, Shubble and himself do not have that same level of protection from the committee that Phil got.

"Also, you're not new here," Quackity says, nudging Fundy with his arm, "You've worked here three years."

"Still feel like an outsider," Fundy mumbles, "Look. You have history spanning back, ten years, easily. I don't have that, it feels like I entered way too late and now I'm just confused all the time. Daniel? Do you get what I'm trying to say?"

"Yeah," Purpled only risks a small glance up from his book at this point, "I dunno, there's a big disconnect between like... Phil, Puffy, Sam and then Techno, Wilbur and Quackity and then like... Fundy, and I imagine there's going to be a disconnect between the new hero recruits. You have to actively make sure they're involved with everything. Also, Fundy was alone, trying to figure this out. I had Tommy at least, I got the job here not that long after, but Fundy was the only hero trainee they took on that year."

Techno hums, he moves so he's sitting on the couch, across from the others though. On the second couch instead of anything else, Techno sighs, leaning back against the couch and looking up at the ceiling.

"Do you think we made the decision too quickly?" Quackity asks, "I mean---"

"No," Techno says, "Well, maybe, but it was the right decision either way. It would've only given us time to talk ourselves out of it and time for other people to assess the benefits of this, rather than wanting to actually take care of the kids."

Quackity nods, and he sighs loudly and dramatically.

Techno rolls his eyes. Quackity flips him off.

"Mature."

"That's what I aim to do."

"Really fuckin' mature."

Quackity grins.

Techno pauses.

There's something that he can hear, in the probable far distance. It's like a high-pitched whine, he looks at Quackity and then Purpled to see if they hear anything. Neither of them are giving off any signs, Techno then looks at Fundy, who has sat up taller and is now looking around for the source of the town.

They make eye contact.

"Oh no," Fundy says.

There's a burst of noise and the entire tower shakes.

As soon as the tower shakes, there's a scream and a gunshot, all of them get ready for a fight.

Purpled is now crouched down behind the couch, gun trained on the elevator door, he's not shaking at all in a way that is incredibly impressive. He looks sure of himself.

Quackity has his staff out, he looks like he takes up a lot more space like this. He doesn't seem as short.

Fundy has crouched down, he has one of his knives at his side, and he's just crouched, listening to the world around them.

Techno feels his own posture change, he doesn't get into a fighting stance like the rest of them, but he stands taller, with his fists by his side, incredibly aware of the world around him. He can hear a plane outside, he can hear cars outside, but he can't hear anything coming from downstairs. He can hear the whirring of the air conditioner.

They're all quiet for several long moments as none of them speak.

"Henry," Quackity says, "What's happening out there?"

Silence.

Complete. Silence.

From the AI that never shuts the fuck up.

It unnerves Techno more than he cares to admit. He holds his hand out in Purpled's direction, and Purpled immediately pushes the hilt of a small knife into his hand.

"You've got to be fucking kidding me," Fundy mutters, "I really have the worst life— I got shot and almost blown up. Was in hospitals for *ages*. On like— my second day at work Theseus uses me at a human punching bag. I was in the hospital, this is my *seventh day back!*"

"Tough to be a main character," Purpled grits out, he moves backwards so he's more against the wall, gun still trained on the elevator. "Alright. What do we do— what's the plan?"

“Wait,” Fundy says, “We don’t know if anything is happening. We’re on like— the top floor.”

“Fifth top,” Techno corrects, it’s mostly out of habit and the fact Wilbur Soot is his brother, Wilbur knows the layout of the tower off by heart, Phil made him learn it for some reason. He tried with Techno but inevitably failed—

And that was beside the point.

They might be being attacked.

“If we’re being attacked,” Purpled says slowly, “Who would it be by—”

“Elysium.”

“Alright. Do we leave slowly— what’s the go here?”

There’s another yell, a gunshot and another yell.

“That’s not good.”

Fundy sighs, “At this point, let Elysium have me— they’ve tried like twice already.”

“Theseus isn’t with Elysium,” Purpled snaps, “He was just there. Elysium has only hurt you once, don’t flatter yourself.”

All of them stay quiet, and Techno edges towards the elevator as slowly as possible, he holds the knife Purpled handed him up, he's not super good with small blades, he preferred his giant

sword when he had that, but right now his options aren't... as many as he'd like.

"Henry?" Techno repeats again, "Are you there?"

Silence.

The lights go out.

Techno is so thankful that Phil wanted the living area of the SBI tower to have giant windows, rather than be in the centre of the space with offices surrounding it like Wilbur wanted. The far corners of the area are flooded with darkness, but Techno, Quackity, Fundy and Purpled can all see pretty much perfectly.

"Alright," Techno says slowly, "What's the plan?"

"Well, I can fly us out," Quackity says, "It's gonna... not be pretty, but I can glide us all down."

"All of us?" Purpled repeats, "You have minor air manipulation not functional wings like Phil."

"My wings are functional."

"Not to carry three people," Techno cuts in, "If you're lucky you can take one. That's assuming you won't be shot out of the sky, we don't know what's happening. They might have people all around the tower waiting, there are multiple winged people in here, it would be dumb not to plan for it."

Quackity grimaces.

A door swings open, and all of them turn on their heels to immediately face it.

The stairwell doors, how could he have been so stupid of course people were going to come up the stairs--- why wouldn't they? Techno resists the urge to whack himself in the face, and instead moves as close to the door as he can in the few seconds he has.

Facing him is an Elysium agent.

Techno puts one hand up.

The others correctly take it as a sign not to engage.

"Okay," Techno says carefully, "I don't know who you are. I'm not going to pretend to know who you are, you probably know who I am."

The Elysium agent just stares at him.

They don't even have a gun out.

Techno can't beat the shit out of someone who doesn't even have a gun, that's just cruel.

"Now, the smart thing for you to do here would be to let us go. Say you scanned this floor or whatever you were sent up here to do."

"You're not supposed to be up here," the agent says, "You're supposed to be in a meeting."

"I am?" Techno tilts his head slightly, "Well, I'm standing here with two heroes and part of the security detail here, and you're unarmed. I would really recommend you listen to us, I don't want to have to hurt you."

The Elysium agent fumbles for a gun.

Over his shoulder, a knife flies past his ear. It lands in the hood of the Elysium agent, pinning them to the wall by their clothes.

"Stay there," Purpled says.

The agent's eyes go wide.

"Downstairs, downstairs," Purpled calls, he pushes past Techno and swings the door to the stairwell open, "There is a very high chance our location has been compromised," he steps into the stairwell.

Techno hesitates for about a second, before running after Purpled. He can hear Quackity and Fundy running after him as well.

Purpled vaults the railing of the stairs in a way that is both impressive and concerning, and he lands on the landing two stories down, before peering over the edge and looking up at Techno, Quackity and Fundy.

"Come on!"

Fundy does the same movement Purpled does, landing it with slightly more grace than Purpled.

Techno doesn't have that kind of movement due to his giant ass prosthetic leg, which is not one meant for running around or exercising even slightly.

"I can't do that— my leg?"

Quackity grabs him by the back of his hoodie, before hauling the both of them over the side of the railing.

Techno... screams, he's going to be completely honest with himself. There is very little heroic or stoic about the noise he makes as he goes spiralling towards the floor.

One thing that he will never get used to, no matter how many times Phil hoists him up into the air, is being in the air and holding onto someone who can fly. So he probably alerts every Elysium agent in the area as Quackity and Techno half-fall, half-glide.

Quackity screams something back at him, and Techno grabs onto Quackity's shoulder as the pair of them hit the ground with far less force than they probably should.

Techno lets go of Quackity and shoves him, "You couldn't have fucking told me?"

"We're in a rush."

Fundy, who at this point is about eight stories up, lets go of the railing and goes plummeting towards the ground.

Quackity yelps, throwing both his arms out in front of him, and apparently slowing down Fundy's landing.

Fundy hits the ground, still with a lot of force, and he stumbles a bit, but he doesn't break anything. "Daniel," Fundy calls over his shoulder, "Jump down, Quackity will catch you---"

"No thank you!" Purpled replies.

He does the same thing he did before, jumping between the rails, each a storey lower each time. It's an incredibly impressive move, and by all accounts one that Daniel Greyson, security at the tower should not know. It is something that Purpled, Logstedchire vigilante and general problem creator should know.

Techno almost wants to tell Purpled that this is a bad move, but then he hears another gunshot, and suddenly it doesn't matter as much.

Purpled lands on the ground next to Techno, wincing slightly. "Ow, my knees."

"I could've caught you," Quackity says, "It was a weird decision to not---"

Purpled shakes his head, he crouches down and hesitates at the door. "Please tell me why this doesn't go the entire way down to the floor?"

"Because it's an easy way to infiltrate," Techno says, shocked that much of Wilbur's rants actually got through to him at any point. "There's no one continuous way in or out of the tower and that's intentional. The stairwells and elevators each go down twenty-five. Four stairwells and four elevators on every floor."

Purpled hisses, he looks at the door in front of them. "We have to go... through floors to get places?"

"Yes, it's like the elevators, you gotta go across some parts of the building to get places. There's stairwells near every set of elevators."

"You had a ten-year head start," Purpled hisses, "Alright. What's the plan, just... move through the space?"

"Yeah," Quackity says, "Unless any of you have a better idea."

"I don't fucking know," Purpled returns, "You're the hero, you're supposed to have the strategy. You trained for battle tactics, I'm just one person."

"Split up," Techno hisses, "It's quicker to have two groups of two moving around than one group of four. Daniel and I will go right, you go left. Do not hesitate, let's go—"

"Wait, what?" Fundy says.

Purpled is already pushing out of the door with his shoulder, gun trained at eye level as he moves forwards. Techno makes a small noise as he attempts to chase after Purpled, darting through the open door.

All Techno can see is the retreating black hooded jacket of Purpled as he turns the corner.

"Don't run out of my sight!" Techno hisses.

Purpled appears to ignore him.

Techno runs down the hallway, he turns a corner.

Some of the paintings that were on the wall are on the ground, he jumps over one of the paintings and almost runs into Purpled.

Purpled is crouched down behind the corner of a wall, gun out and peering forwards slightly.

Techno grabs onto Purpled's shoulders to steady himself, and Purpled makes a small noise. Techno moves forwards, peering his head around the corner. There's nothing there and Techno is so grateful for that.

“Stairwell?” Purpled asks.

“Stairwell.”

Both of them move around the corner, Techno is moving slightly behind Purpled, just because Purpled has the gun. They walk relatively quietly through this section of the floor, Purpled jumping at every shadow.

It doesn’t take long and they make it to the stairwell.

Purpled pulls the door open slowly, holding the gun in his other hand.

There’s no one here.

Purpled grabs onto the rail, before looking over the edge and peering down. He frowns slightly, before glancing at Techno. “Yeah, that’s— fine.”

“No one there?”

“Not that I can see.”

“Move down then.”

And they do.

Purpled doesn’t dart back and forth between both stairwells the way he did before, instead, he descends the stairs like a normal, human person. Which Techno is grateful for, because he knows Purpled doesn’t have a way to break their fall.

And Techno does not want to fall down the stairwell again.

Even if Quackity is there, Techno does not need that even slightly.

Purpled pauses about ten flights of stairs down, about five storeys and Techno is wheezing, holding onto the railing.

Instead of sympathy, Purpled just gives him the most unimpressed look in the entire world. “You’re a hero—”

“I don’t do much cardio,” Techno wheezes, he breathes for a few more moments, before running down the stairs again.

They both run for a bit longer, there’s no one guarding the stairwell, which Techno thinks is really odd— it’s poor planning, if Techno was going to try to take over a building he would control the only ways up and down.

Techno doesn’t know if it’s poor planning, or something worse.

He can only hope it’s poor planning.

Purpled pauses in front of the door, he takes a deep breath and holds the gun up higher. He leans his shoulder against the wall, ready to push it open with his shoulder.

With a deep breath, Purpled sighs. “Alright, we can fuck them up—”

“Wait, no—”

Techno grabs Purpled's shoulder, who immediately jolts and looks at Techno, his hand on a knife— more than ready to stab it through his hand.

“No violence.”

“Huh?” Purpled screws up his face, “Wha’?”

“Most of them are kids, radicalised kids who think this is the only way for change—”

“It’s a way for change—” Purpled challenges.

“But not the only way,” Techno hisses back, “I shot a fucking gun at a president, I know about drastic ways to enact change— but no one should die for the things they believe in, people shouldn’t have to get hurt for the things they believe in.”

Purpled frowns at him.

“Violence is not the answer for this,” Techno whispers, looking over his shoulder, “Please, just trust me on this one.”

And Purpled frowns at him, before putting the gun in his holster on his leg, “Fine— but if I get hit I’m going to hit back twice as hard.”

Baby steps.

Techno decides that these are baby steps.

Purpled frowns for a few moments, “So what’s the plan?”

“Collect as many people and just... leave.”

“Abandon the tower?”

“Why wouldn’t we?” Techno returns, “I’m not getting injured or hurting other people for this fucking place,” he gestures around him, “If they want to burn it to the fucking ground I implore them to. I’ll fucking light the first match at this point—”

Purpled watches him for a moment before his mouth quirks up into a smile. “Alright, Blade, what’s the go?”

“We find Phil,” Techno says, “We only hit if we’re hit first. Try to talk it out, y’know, like a normal person. All of these people could almost be us.”

“Y’know,” Purpled stands up, peering around the corner, “I almost joined Elysium. They have a pretty good deal for vigilantes, I dunno if— Tommy ever found out about that, but it’s pretty good.”

“Daniel...”

“Relax, relax,” Purpled waves a hand, “Punz works there, I don’t wanna be bossed around by that shithead. I’ve bought some tech off them though—”

“Daniel?”

“It was cheap, I got a good deal.”

“I’m starting to be more worried about you than Tommy,” Techno mutters, “Y’know how hard that is to do?”

Purpled pauses for a moment, before shrugging, “It’s kinda my thing, everyone forgetting about me and my very obvious concerning behaviour, I’m okay with it.”

Techno opens his mouth to reply.

“Come on, we got a chicken tender to find.”

“Really?”

“KFC reincarnated.”

“How many of these have you thought of?”

“Soon to be schnitzel-ed old bird.”

“How?”

“Day-old chicken nugget.”

Techno sighs, standing up straighter and peering around the edge.

It’s clear, which Techno would assume considering the sheer amount of noise they have been making, Purpled crouches down slightly and does a weird little shuffle run down the hallway.

Techno walks down the hallway, footsteps careful, but nowhere near as concealed as Purpled’s weird child assassin footsteps that he does.

They both pause by the next turn.

There are Elysium people there.

Techno jumps, pushing his back against the wall as he looks at Purpled with wide eyes.

He peeks around the edge again, there are a significant amount of guns, and he's pretty sure Jenny from accounting is sitting on the ground, hands above her head, and entirely seeming unamused about this.

Purpled pauses for a moment, looking back and forth.

"I have an idea," he whispers, "It's either really fucking stupid, or the smartest thing I'll ever do—"

"Wait, P— Daniel!" He hisses.

Purpled steps out from around the corner, hands in his pockets.

Immediately several guns are pointed at him.

"G'day," Purpled says, looking at everyone who now has several guns pointed at him, it seems like he's underestimated the number of guns that would be pointed at him. "Uh— I'm wondering where the bathroom is?"

Techno just fights the urge to throw himself off a bridge.

Fuck's sake.

Between Tommy and Purpled, Techno's probably already getting grey hair. And now he is mildly concerned about Sniff and also Aimsey and them in general— and— when did Techno get so many fucking emotional support teenagers?

With a sigh, Techno runs a hand down his face.

He probably shouldn't let Purpled get shot.

Tommy would be unimpressed and that is putting it *fucking kindly*.

Putting it more accurately, Tommy would probably tear the world apart for his best friend, and Techno will be left to deal with the entire situation that would come afterwards.

“Who are you?”

“Daniel Greyson,” Purpled responds easily as if that's more of his name than Purpled ever was, “Uh— I'm security, and the training exercise is over.”

“Training exercise?” Jenny from accounting says.

Techno wants to hit his head against a wall.

Purpled is so fucking stupid.

He would say it's almost genius how stupid he is, but no, he's just fucking stupid.

“Yeah?” Purpled says, “You think we don’t practice what would happen if people invaded the building?”

“This isn’t a training exercise,” someone with a gas mask says.

“Gary,” Purpled sighs, “This training exercise is over, we have to evacuate the building, as is protocol.”

“My name is Larrisa—”

“Y’know how we are Gary, thick as thieves, it’s a childhood nickname.”

Did Purpled get his bullshitting skills from Tommy? Because fucking Prime, someone’s going to get shot if they’re not careful.

It is a non-violent approach.

An... incredibly fucking stupid approach.

But still, it’s an approach.

Techno sighs, leaning his head against the wall.

He hears rustling clothes.

No shot that actually worked—

Techno peers his head around the corner.

And sure enough, all the workers who were crowded onto the ground, sitting down with their hands over their heads... just stand up, and Techno knows these Elysium agents aren't trained, they're kids who were given guns to look scary.

"Let's go," Purpled says, glancing over his shoulder and catching Techno's eye. He jerks his head backwards and towards the stairwell across the other space of the room. "You lot take the stairs over there," he points to the other set of closer stairs.

All of them stare at each other a lot.

"Wait a fucking second," one of the Elysium members says, "You can't just leave—"

Purpled does not hesitate to whirl around and point a gun at the Elysium member, "Just let this one go."

The group of workers yelp, ducking out of the way and Purpled just tilts his head slightly.

Another Elysium agent pulls out a gun, pointing it right at Purpled.

Techno jumps out of his spot, both hands up and knife at the ready. He holds it out in front of him, and the Elysium agent's gun switches from being focused on Purpled, to being focused on Techno.

While Techno doesn't want to get shot, he does think he could take a bullet wound much better than Purpled could.

Purpled, to his credit, doesn't even fucking flinch, he just looks bored.

“Come on,” Purpled says, there’s something almost pleading in his voice, he sighs slightly, “You know this isn’t worth it— you don’t get paid enough for this. I also don’t get paid enough for this—” he looks at Techno.

Techno raises an eyebrow.

“Will I get a raise?”

“Sure.”

Purpled trains his gaze back on the Elysium agent. “Alright, I get paid enough for this. This isn’t worth it, I will put a bullet through your knee.”

The Elysium agent points the gun back at Purpled.

Purpled sighs.

“Wait, is this not a training exercise?” One of them asks.

“Does it look like a training exercise?” Techno snaps back, Techno turns to look at the Elysium agents and Purpled, eyes flickering to the gun pointed directly at Purpled’s forehead.

Purpled can probably jump out of the way, or figure something out, but Techno does not want to take the risk of having to move Purpled out of the way.

Techno sighs, “Look,” he starts, which isn’t his strongest opening, but it works. “These guys are just workers in the tower, if you want to shoot me— well I’d love to see you try. But these guys are not paid enough to care, just let them go. The only thing that happens here is the risk of hurting innocent civilians. That’s not the message you want to be sending.”

A moment of hesitation.

Purpled tilts his head again. From the few times Techno's seen Tommy stalling like this, Tommy trying to stall tends to have slightly more charm, rather than— whatever this is. Tommy makes people emotionally attached to him very quickly, Purpled threatens to shoot people very quickly.

What a pair those two are.

“Daniel.” Techno deadpans.

Purpled just looks at him, an almost Tommy-like grin on his face, “What? Those are baby steps. I only threatened it—”

Techno grabs Purpled by the shoulder, dragging him backwards, “Take the closest stairwell down to the floor.”

The workers all look at each other, before shrugging and walking across the foyer area, the Elysium agents splutter and yell orders, but none of them— care enough to listen to them, which makes Techno laugh a little.

And obviously, the Elysium agents are not emotionally prepared enough to shoot civilians, so it slides.

Techno and Purpled take a few steps backwards, towards where he knows the other stairwell to be.

Four stairwells that go down twenty-five levels on every floor, to match the elevators. Four stairwells—

At moments like these, Techno is glad that he kind of pays attention to Wilbur when he gets excited about things like this, Wilbur has the tower layout memorised, and Techno really wishes that he was here because he'd have them darting around the tower like nobody's business.

He picks up his phone as they retreat backwards.

Purpled still has his gun trained on the Elysium members, and the Elysium members have it trained on him, but it seems like no one is going to shoot.

He brings his phone up to his ear, clicking on Wilbur's contact. It's a really funny photo of him when they were about twenty, it was one of his attempts to 'eat the camera' and because of it, it is the worst photo that Techno has of him.

So, of course, it's also Wilbur's contact photo.

He waits.

The call doesn't go through.

Not even like it's ringing, like the phone on the other end is on aeroplane mode or off completely.

Techno puts his phone down, shoving it back into his pocket, and ignoring the thing in the back of his head which is now screaming that something's wrong with Wilbur, and if something's wrong with Wilbur, that means something is probably wrong with Tommy.

Maybe they had made it to the tower in time, maybe this is an attack all across L'Manberg, maybe it's a lot of things.

He is not a fan of thinking of any of them.

They turn the corner and Purpled immediately drops the gun to his side, shoving it into the holster on his leg. He glances at Techno, “You good?”

“Yeah...” Techno grabs his phone out again, just staring at it for a moment, “We have to deal with this first.” Then he puts the phone back into his pocket and takes off towards the next stairwell.

Purpled follows after him, eventually catching up, because Techno can’t run as fast as Purpled as probably a combination of this clunky-ass prosthetic leg and Purpled just being a speedy person.

They skid around a corner, and Purpled barrels into the door first, it creaks as it is a pull door and not a push door from this side. Purpled makes a noise and brings his hand to his now-sore shoulder.

“Dumbass.”

“Fuck off,” Purpled swings open the door.

There are gunshots going off that echo up the stairwell, it’s the loudest stairwell they’ve been in so far, and if Techno had to guess. He’d say that most of them are still stuck on the first twenty-five floors of the tower.

Huh.

Okay.

That’s good.

But then that leads to the question, how did the others get so far up? Were they already here

They might have already been here.

Purpled pauses at the sound of the first gunshot, he screws up his face before crouching down next to the rail, he then peers through the bars to try and see— well anything, it appears.

Techno doesn't crouch down, again, his leg, but he does move as much against the wall as he can and holds the knife tight enough in his fist that his knuckles go white.

Purpled leans back, looking at Techno, '*Two*,' he mouths and holds up two fingers to really drive home his point.

Techno frowns. He reaches into his pockets for anything he might own, a couple of loose bits of change, a phone, a stick that Tommy gave to him and then Techno didn't throw out. A stone he thought was cool—

Purpled appears to be doing the same.

Out of his various pockets, he pulls out a utility knife, a fifty-dollar note, his phone and a tightly folded rain poncho.

Techno gives him an incredulous look.

Purpled rolls his eyes, before looking over the edge again.

He must see nothing new, because he grabs all of his stuff again, putting it in his pockets.

Techno looks at Purpled.

He mimes throwing the coin over the edge, then pointing at Purpled and then miming the motion of him jumping down.

Purpled tilts his head in confusion, raising one hand as if to say '*what the fuck are you even saying?*'

Techno huffs. He points at Purpled. Then at the stairwell.

He hesitates for a few moments, before pointing at himself, then at the stairwell, moving his finger from side to side and down slightly. Motioning the Spider-Man shit that Purpled's been doing to move down the stairwells beforehand.

Techno nods.

Purpled gives a thumbs up.

Techno hands Purpled the coin.

Purpled takes a deep breath, before standing up and swinging his legs over the railing. He jumps down a few, grabbing onto the opposite side of the railing and shimmying himself down so he touches the concrete.

Then he jumps and lands again.

And again.

And Techno starts moving down the stairs too, he has no way of keeping up with Purpled. But Purpled doesn't get too far out of eye range. Techno still moves against the wall.

Then he hears a coin drop.

A confused noise from an Elysium agent.

Then all he hears is fabric move and silence.

Techno peers over the edge.

About four storeys worth of stairs down, Purpled is crouched on the landing, holding a limp Elysium agent in his arms. Purpled places them down slowly, and carefully, his eyes meeting Techno's for a moment.

What. The. Fuck?

Purpled looks up at him, *'Strangle'* he mouths, *'Takes five seconds.'*

Techno isn't sure if he should be incredibly impressed, incredibly terrified or a healthy combination of the two. He thinks that he's a healthy combination of the two. Because Purpled is both very impressive and terrifying.

They can co-exist.

Techno gets onto the landing that Purpled's on.

Purpled hesitates for a few moments before holding out his hand and Techno drops another coin into his hand.

The gunshots are louder now, they're about halfway down.

Purpled hauls himself over the edge again, holding onto the railing before jumping down.

Techno walks down the stairs, caring a little bit less this time, and trying not to flinch at every gunshot. They're infrequent, meaning that there's no pattern, meaning that Techno jumps every time there's one.

It echoes around the entire stairwell, sounding so much worse because of— all of this.

Once again, Techno hears the drop of a coin.

A moment of silence.

"Hello," says Purpled from a few stories down, "Don't mind me."

A grunt of some kind, more rustling of fabric and quiet movement then it goes quiet again, and Techno catches up to Purpled to see him propping this person up against the wall.

"It's fine, it only lasts a bit," Purpled says, gesturing to the door to the side of him.

"Ready?"

"Ready."

Purpled takes a deep breath, before shoving the door open with his shoulder.

There's immediately a gunshot and Purpled throws himself forwards, he hits the floor and rolls, before managing to press himself against the wall.

Techno moves not long after, it's not graceful even slightly, but Techno lands with his shoulder against the ground and winces at the pain. He scrambles upwards so he's leaning against the wall, back pressed against it.

Then he examines the scene.

They're in a foyer room to the side of the tower, this is mostly how the heroes get in after lunch breaks and stuff. Whoever was shooting at them was shooting through the giant archway, meaning the wall on either side is safe.

And on the other side of the wall are Phil and Kristin.

Phil and Kristin are both pressed up against a wall across from them, bullets are firing overhead and Techno waves his arms frantically to get Phil's attention, or Kristin's—

And Phil's eyes snap to him.

He's holding a sword in his hand—

That's Techno's sword.

He hasn't used it in months, but still, he opens his mouth to yell at Phil for taking his sword.

Then a shot overhead and Techno drops onto the ground, pressing his back against the wall. Purpled, who is much smarter than Techno is at this sorta stuff, is already against the wall, gun at his side.

“What’s the fucking play?” Techno yells out.

“I don’t fucking know!” Phil yells back, he closes his eyes, sighing slightly. “You come up with a plan fucking mentor soon-to-be.”

“Fuck off!” Techno yells back.

Then he realises that... Phil is giving him control over the situation.

He has to be the Phil in this situation, he doesn’t know if Phil is fatally bleeding out or trying to get some leadership qualities out of him but both are just about equally terrifying.

Okay.

The situation.

Phil, Kristin, Purpled and Techno are stuck behind two walls that then have an arch, and then leads out of the building. The issue is that people are guarding the side door. They have someone who can fly—

Techno glances over at Phil.

He leans his head back against the wall.

Purpled has his gun aimed straight at the door that they came out of, this way they can’t be flanked. There won’t be as many Elysium agents here, can they draw them away? Can they do literally anything—

He glances at Phil.

Phil has his eyes closed and he takes a deep breath.

He looks back at Purpled.

Kristin is still pressed against the wall, holding a stapler more like a gun than something to use staples with.

Why is Techno driving the fucking bus?

Then an Elysium member walks right through the archway.

For a long moment, everyone freezes.

Techno makes eye contact with the Elysium agent.

“Hello,” Techno says.

Then the Elysium agent goes for their gun, and Techno is pushing off the floor and launching himself at them before he can even think about it.

Both of them hit the floor with a thump, and then Techno has a gun against his forehead.

Rude.

Around him, he can hear the swoop of wings as Phil takes off, he can hear the safety clicking off a gun and he can hear Kristin move, spinning around on her heel and he hears her hit someone in the face.

It sounds like a good hit.

And gun, gun against his head that he should probably handle.

He reaches up with one hand and—

Crushes the barrel of the gun in his hand.

Both the agent and Techno stare at each other, Techno half wants to be impressed that he can do that with one hand.

Another part of him is slightly horrified that he can do that with one hand.

Then Techno swings up with his other hand.

He clocks the agent in the side of the face, and they slum. Techno throws them off of him, before getting back on his feet and turning around.

Phil is fighting someone.

Purpled has his gun trained on someone.

Kristin looks unsure if she's supposed to go into this fight or not.

Techno doesn't have a chance to tell Kristin anything before pain erupts in his face and he makes a noise in the back of his throat.

He feels the all-too-familiar pain of being punched in the face.

Where did this fucker come from?

Techno holds his nose with one hand. He's bleeding.

Is his nose broken now?

Techno manages to reach up and grab the person by the wrist, he looks them in the eyes, the goggle-covered eyes, and he knows there's something tired in his eyes.

"You don't want to do this," Techno says, looking at the gun being waved around in his face, "I know you've never shot a gun before, and I know you think this will do something, but it won't. You'll just—you'll just carry guilt with you, for years and years and years."

"I'm not scared!" They whisper, Techno knows the malice they're trying to get in their tone.

He also knows it's bullshit.

Techno just looks at them, letting something tired fill his expression, "You are, and that's okay. Realistically what does shooting any hero do, what does killing anyone do?"

"Sends a message."

"What message?" Techno asks, "That you're willing to kill your biggest supporters? You think you guys hate the heroes? We hate them more."

A moment of hesitation.

“This won’t do anything,” Techno says, “This attack— excellent message, attack the symbol of the thing, show it’s not indestructible. Attacking the people inside of it? That’s just another grave in the heroes’ graveyard. A martyr. A reason that you guys are dangerous and should be stopped.”

Techno just sighs, dropping their wrist.

He wants to say so much.

He wants to take this kid by the shoulders and start yelling about violence and the cycles, and he wants to grab them and tell them that you need to kill the roots of an organisation, not the people within it, and that the cause they’re fighting for, the group will never care the same way they do. There’s... so much to say, and Techno can barely say any of it.

They won’t listen.

It’s just a kid. They’re all fucking children, and they’re risking their lives for causes like this, they feel a *need* to throw everything away for causes like this. They almost have to because Techno knows things would be so much worse if Elysium wasn’t here pushing back.

They’ve failed the children of Logstedchire.

“You’re throwin’ away your life for a cause that will not hesitate to drop you if it works in their self-interest,” Techno says, he tries to keep his voice gentle, “And— I just need you to know that, and I need you to be careful.”

They frown, at least Techno imagines they do. He *hopes* they do.

He's aware of the noise around them, Purpled is fighting someone hand-to-hand. No one has gone for Techno since this agent has grappled him, Techno can still hear the flapping of wings and Kristin's grunts as it sounds like she's beating someone up with a potted plant.

Techno doesn't move for a moment, just staring at the agent in front of him.

The agent hesitates, just for a few seconds.

For a moment Techno thinks he's going to have to fight again.

Then, the agent takes off, running in the other direction, out the door that Techno is so familiar with.

Techno stares for a few moments, before snapping back into it.

People are still fighting, and Techno is near Kristin before he can stop himself. She's swinging a potted plant at someone. Techno laughs loudly as Kristin turns to look at him.

She has a small cut across her cheek.

"Could I have that?" Techno asks.

Kristin hands out the pot.

Techno pelts it at the chest of the closest agent in front of them.

"Stay down," Techno says, as they hit the ground with a crash, making a small noise.

Kristin just stares at him, “I forget how strong you are.”

“Me too, we’re gonna go out the door—”

There’s a gunshot.

It shakes the entire room, and Techno turns on his heel before he can even assess if there are any other threats.

Phil cries out and lands on the floor, he skids along the floor with such force that he hits his head on the wall behind him.

Techno is moving towards him before he can think of doing anything else.

He barely notices the person trying to stab him.

Instead, he gets to see Kristin, with something furious in her gaze grab the person gunning for him. He gets to watch as she slams the staple gun into their hand.

The person screams, dropping the knife to the ground.

Techno lands next to Phil, dropping down and looking at Phil.

He’s clutching his shoulder, which is starting to bleed profusely. “Exit wound?” Techno asks.

Phil shakes his head. “Stuck there. Can’t move the way I need to fly.”

Techno moves so he's in front of Phil, if someone tries another bullet at Phil, it'll hit him first. It's a basic protection tactic, one of the first things Phil taught him, to make your own body bigger to protect someone else.

Fuck.

The top of his wing looks bent slightly, unnaturally, and Techno has no idea how to fix any of these things. He glances over his shoulder, Purpled is ducking out of the way of something, and Kristin is swinging her staple gun around like a fucking weapon.

He looks back at Phil, "Pressure put pressure on it—"

"I know first aid, Techno."

"Put pressure on it."

"I'm aware!"

There's another gunshot.

Then another one.

Techno turns around, still using his own body to protect Phil's as he stares straight ahead.

Purpled has his gun pointed up.

The Elysium agent in front of him is on the ground, clutching their leg which is streaming with blood that slides over the floor in a puddle around their leg. Techno can only see the back of Purpled's head, everything seems fine—

He turns back to Phil, “Oi, Daniel, please put pressure on that. Don’t let them bleed out.”

Techno reaches for Phil’s wing, and Phil winces. “Don’t—”

“Put pressure on it, old man.”

“I’m putting pressure on it,” Phil hisses back.

Techno takes a deep breath, trying to steady himself, just for now.

Okay. Things are fine.

As fine as they can be right now—

“Holy fuck!” Kristin yells.

Techno once again, turns around, looking over his shoulder.

Purpled’s turned around now.

There is blood spilling from Purpled’s side, he’s wearing a black shirt with a jacket over the top, so all Techno can see is a glistening mass of something. He’s clutching to wound, to the best of his ability, as blood flows onto his hand.

“Oh,” Purpled eventually says, voice quiet. “That’s gonna be an issue—”

And somewhere, in the very back of Techno's mind. He realises something.

A conversation, from not that long ago.

Purpled's afraid of blood.

He passes out when he sees too much blood.

There's a quip in the back of his brain as well about several jokes about that, how Purpled, who was long seen as the most ruthless vigilante in Logstedchire can not stand the sight of blood.

But that is not important right now, because Purpled might pass out from the sight of his own blood.

And somehow Phil is almost forgotten, as Techno grabs his jumper from where Phil was holding it against his shoulder.

Phil yelps, but Techno doesn't care much.

He catches Purpled with one arm, before sitting him down on the floor. He puts his arm behind Purpled to keep him upright and presses his hands to the wound.

Immediately he takes off Purpled's black jacket and pushes it against the wound.

"Kristin," Techno calls over his shoulder, "You're on Phil duty."

"You just left me!" Phil yells, but it seems a lot weaker.

Techno just gives him a sharp look, “Yeah, one of you has been shot in the stomach. You’ll be fine.”

“Will I not be fine?” Purpled sounds on the verge of hysteria, his hands clasping over the top of the jacket, pushing it against his stomach. Techno really needs more fabric to make this work well. “Am I at risk of dying?”

And yup— Purpled’s properly panicking now.

“You’re fine— just less fine than Phil.”

Techno glances at Purpled, there’s mottled bruising around his neck, and Techno stares at it for a moment too long. They’re old injuries. Faded, but not enough that Techno isn’t concerned.

From a patrol?

But Purpled is holding his side, and bleeding all through the weak pressure that Techno is applying, and Techno *should* be focused on that.

“What happened?” Techno asks, “It looks like you’ve been choked out.”

Purpled’s eyes shoot wide for a moment, and he looks at Techno, “Just— just patrol, please stop the blood. I hate blood—”

“It’s okay,” Techno promises him, because how could he do anything but that?

They’ve failed the children of Logstedchire.

It keeps repeating in his head, over and over and over, he was a child of Logstedchire and he was failed by everything. Purpled's a child of Logstedchire and the heroes, the government, and even the people in L'Manberg failed him. Tommy. Aimsey. Sniff. TapL. Niki. Eret. *Himself.*

How many of them have to be failed until something changes?

"Techno?" Purpled says.

Techno shoves himself out of his thoughts, before looking back at Purpled.

Ah, yeah. The huge fucking bullet wound in Purpled's side.

He should probably... keep on handling that.

"You... you okay?" Purpled asks.

Techno nods, "You're okay. Alright? Medics are coming soon, maybe even some healers if they're feeling nice. Keep pressure on it, alright? We're breaking this down like a battle tactic."

Purpled nods. His eyes are glassy and unfocused, but he meets Techno's eyes.

"We need pressure, we need assistance," Techno keeps his voice even. "Okay? Don't look at it."

Techno doesn't have much of an option unlike Purpled, he stares at the red mass that Purpled's side has become. There's a lot of blood.

Still, it's *Purpled*.

The fucker isn't supposed to get hurt.

Let alone panic about being hurt.

"What's the bruising from?" Techno asks, trying to provide more pressure.

Purpled doesn't even feel it.

Techno doesn't know whether to be relieved or concerned.

Purpled hums, "Uh— run-in with someone."

"Huh? Who?"

"Just— some fuck who keeps annoyin' me on patrol," Purpled mutters, "Don't worry about it, I got it handled."

"Do you?" Techno says, "If you need—"

"I'm bleeding out, shut the fuck up. Focus on making me not die—" Purpled's eyes flicker down, and he makes a retching noise. "I hate blood— I hate blood, fuck. I hate it so much."

"You're okay, you're okay," Techno promises, "Close your eyes. Or just look up, don't look down again."

Purpled just frowns, but he closes his eyes.

Techno risks a glance over at Kristin and Phil. Kristin is holding Phil's own jacket against his shoulder, she seems to be having more success than he does with stopping the bleeding. Phil is...

Giving Kristin heart eyes.

With a bullet in his shoulder.

Techno resists the urge to slam his head into the wall.

"The thing—" Phil says, "You did with the staple gun was— pretty cool."

Purpled opens his eyes, giving Techno the most deadpanned look possible. He glances at Phil and Kristin then back at Techno. "Is he delirious with blood loss or just like that?"

"Just like that," Kristin says, "Thank you, Phil."

"It was pretty fucking cool," Purpled bites out, "Now please shut the fuck up."

Phil makes a noise but seems to think that's a good idea.

"Okay," Techno puts his attention back on the bleeding child that he's now holding in his arms. "Keep talkin' kid."

"I hate it when you call me kid."

“You don’t.”

Purpled’s silence is *incredibly* telling.

“Tell me something,” Techno says, “Something you haven’t told anyone else.”

“You’re terrible at conversation starters,” Purpled says, his eyes are screwed shut and his hands are also pressing against the same wound that Techno’s are. “Uh— shit, it doesn’t hurt — that’s bad right?”

“It means high adrenaline,” Techno replies, he has no clue if that’s correct or not, but it sounds vaguely right enough and Purpled isn’t going to question anything he says right now. “Tell me something you haven’t told anyone else.”

“I don’t know,” Purpled mutters, “I don’t just have these things prepared for your shitty conversation starters.”

“You should, I feel like we’re going to have a lot more,” Techno says and Purpled sighs at that. “What was your favourite subject in school?”

“Didn’t go to school. Was tutored.”

“What do you reckon your favourite subject would have been?”

“Biology— science,” Purpled manages, his eyes are still closed, but he looks the calmest he has looked this entire time. “I think if I wasn’t— me, I would have done something in science. What about you?”

“Some sort of professor,” Techno says, “I think I’d still like to do that, down the track.”

“I can see you doing that, lecturing some kids. I think you’d be the cool teacher, the one that everyone likes.”

“That means a lot coming from you.”

“Everyone apart from me, you’re the worst.”

“Sure I am,” Techno glances around for any paramedics who may have started swarming the building.

He is pretty sure the location is secure now, but part of him is paranoid, so he slowly picks the gun up from Purpled’s half-curled hand.

Purpled lets it go with no resistance.

Techno thinks that means something like trust, but he’s not sure.

“You are,” Purpled murmurs, “The fucking worst. You think you know shit about shit.”

“I don’t know shit about anything,” Techno confesses easily.

Purpled screws up his face, eyes opening and boring into Techno. “You know things, if I wasn’t me, I wouldn’t mind following you.”

“Following me?”

“Like— into battle,” Purpled finishes, his eyes flickering down to the wound and he winces immediately, “I have trouble following orders though if I wasn’t me... that’s a whole other story.”

Techno doesn't know how to even start breaking that statement into manageable pieces, Techno isn't an expert, but he's pretty sure that's trust, coming from Purpled. And if Techno thinks about it more, it seems more like trust and almost like something close to respect.

He doesn't know how to feel about the fact Purpled both trusts and respects him, or it at least feels like that but— it doesn't feel bad. Techno thinks he's glad to have Purpled's trust.

There's movement and Techno points the gun upwards.

Purpled's eyes go wide, and he tries to look over his shoulder, but it apparently hurts too much for him to do that. So instead, he meets Techno's eyes, looking for any reactions.

It's a paramedic.

"We need assistance!" Techno calls out, "Two people down here."

The seemingly panicked paramedic hurries into their room, it's just off to the side so it makes sense. Then there's a swarm of people.

The next bit is a blur of Techno trying to wash his hands, people attending to Purpled's wounds and then him getting stood up as a paramedic explains that he'll have to be taken to hospital.

It seems the tower has survived— whatever this is.

Purpled takes a shaky breath, looking at Techno with slightly wide eyes, he catches Techno's wrist. There's something panicked in his eyes. Techno recognises the expression from when he, himself was younger.

Techno can't go with him, not yet—

This is the most panicked that Techno has ever seen Purpled look and Techno knows he's scared of being left behind, it was the same thing Techno was terrified until he—

Got the SBI necklace. From Phil.

He takes the SBI necklace off his neck before he can stop himself. It's been tucked into his shirt the entire time, right next to the "bedrock" one he's been wearing this entire time. The necklace is nice.

It's a simple golden chain, with an emerald— or just a dark green gem, Techno's never gotten it tested, with golden detailing surrounding the edges of it. He puts it over Purpled's neck.

Purpled screws up his nose.

"You gotta give that back," Techno says, "When I see you. Very soon. I need to sort out some things here first, then I'll be right there. Alright? I'll grab Tommy as well."

Purpled nods, and he screws his eyes shut.

"You're okay," is the final thing Techno can think of saying, "I'll see you soon. That's a promise, I'm not just leaving you."

Purpled nods, "I know."

He lets go of Techno's arm and screws his eyes shut a little bit more.

Techno watches both Phil and Purpled get loaded up into the ambulances, there's some more people around being patched up.

None of them seem too bad, and Techno has only heard five other ambulances leave yet.

That's not... terrible, considering how many people work here.

It's still too many.

He watches the two ambulances pull out and head towards the hospitals, their sirens blaring.

When the ambulances are gone, Techno lets himself breathe.

In and out.

In and out.

Everything is under control for now, there is nothing that panicking will do to help right now. He just breathes for a few more moments, in and out, in and out. He's okay— Phil and Purpled will be okay.

Then he turns around and walks back into the building.

Kristin meets him, there's a similar look in her own eyes.

"How did they get in," Techno asks, grabbing Kristin's arm and walking them into the room. "They didn't get in through the window, did you let them in?"

“No,” Kristin says, “Of fucking course I didn’t. I had a gun pointed at me.”

“People swarmed from inside the tower as well too, though,” Techno thinks back to the hostage situation one of the members attempted, “Somehow people got in— then maybe had some sort of signal. How did they get in?”

“I—” Kristin pauses, “Heroes can give out visitation.”

“What?”

“You— or Wilbur or Phil, if you want family or something else to visit while you’re at work — you can give someone a visitation badge— you know this, Niki has one. Security doesn’t have to clear it like it does for tours and things similar.”

“You’re saying a hero did this?”

“Hero and high leadership can do this,” Kristin says, she sounds a little bit frantic, similar to how Techno feels. “That means like— the hero committee, senior staff— the heads of departments.”

Techno looks at Kristin. “Aren’t you the head of security?”

“You think I did this?” Kristin cries out, “Yes, I would organise the overtaking of my workplace *while I’m inside* , even though I have a day off tomorrow, and I would put several people I care about into risk! In fact, I organised to get Phil shot. Your theory makes no sense, you have more motive to do this than me!”

“I do not!”

“You hate the heroes, Wilbur and Tommy aren’t here. The only other person you care about is here, but—”

“I care about more people than Wilbur and Tommy and Phil!” Techno snaps, “Alright, neither of us did it, who fucking would?”

Kristin looks quiet for a moment, then she shrugs. “We shouldn’t be talking about this in the foyer,” she gestures around them, “Maybe— I don’t know.”

“We’ll head up to the SBI floor,” Techno says, “Maybe someone left their address up there and explicit instructions on how they broke in.”

Kristin gives him a flat look, but the pair of them start clambering up the stairs in relative silence.

Stairs are tiring, is what Techno decides. Especially climbing up several levels very quickly.

“You’re head of security, what other department heads would help organise something like this?”

“I don’t know,” Kristin mutters, “It doesn’t— make sense, none of this makes sense. Someone might have gotten onto my computer and approved someone for permission but— it has to go through more stages than just me saying it’s okay. It goes through the security team beforehand.”

“Has anyone who’s not you been on your computer recently?” Techno asks.

“Uh— not beyond the usual.”

“What’s the usual?” Techno asks slowly.

“Other security team members— I’ve known them all for years, I don’t think they would?” A long moment of silence, “We had an event not that long ago. I let in all the catering. But they had their files looked through beforehand. None of them were dodgy.”

“The usual caterers?” Techno pauses to breathe, holding onto the rail. He hates stairs.

“Yeah,” Kristin murmurs, “It doesn’t fucking make sense— if I did end up letting these people in I’ll be accused of this which isn’t fair because there are five other levels of security before and two more after me—”

They’re silent as they climb up the rest of the stairs, up to the right floor. Out of breath from talking and climbing at the same time, and Techno thinks that his adrenaline is slowly starting to die.

Techno takes a deep breath, he stands in the doorway for a few moments. How did these people even get in—

He walks into the SBI floor, the stairs are tiring but Techno is fuelled with something beyond spite and fury. He doesn’t know what he’s looking for— he knows more skilled investigators are going to comb the room.

Kristin is by his side either way, and Techno could not be more grateful for anything right now.

He just breathes in and out for a long moment, standing in the doorway leading out from the stairwell, he holds onto the wall, just breathing.

Everything is fine. Purpled and Phil are at hospital, and Techno’s just gonna look around this floor before going to find Wilbur and Tommy and fill them in on the situation. It’s easy enough.

His eye catches something on the coffee table.

Techno glances at Kristin, who is also staring at the things on the coffee table.

He can make them out to be... a piece of paper.

And two flowers.

It's the two flowers that get him.

Techno is walking ahead before he can stop himself, it could be a trap, it could be a threat—it could be something he should leave untouched, but there's that part of his brain that he's never been able to ignore.

He straight up steps over the couch, in a way that he should not be able to do with the prosthetic he's wearing, and he knows he'll probably regret it tomorrow.

“Techno, wait—”

Techno does not wait, he picks up the piece of paper.

Give these to your brother for me.

- Chloris

An obsidian iris.

An oxeye daisy, with what is either paint or blood staining one of the sides of the daisy.

What the fuck does that mean?

Wilbur should be— at home, or on his way to work or something else. Unless it means Tommy? But that doesn't make sense. Why oxeye daisies? It's— patience or something, he thinks he remembers Niki saying it once.

This doesn't make sense.

Maybe it's not meant for him.

Who else in the tower has brothers though? Ones that they care about especially— on the SBI floor it's just... well, Wilbur and Techno— maybe Tommy if Techno tries to push but that doesn't make sense and—

Chloris. One of the names for the Elysium leader.

Persephone, Chloris, Adonis? He thinks there was another name that he's forgetting.

The note is typed out.

The flowers are confusing.

Techno can't even fathom words in his head beyond the most basic of things, let alone speak anything outloud.

Wilbur.

Where's Wilbur?

He didn't pick up his phone earlier—

He turns around to look at Kristin, “We need to find Wilbur. He might have been kidnapped or—”

Kristin has turned to look at the TV playing the news, the TV is muted, as it always is, but often it's the first sign that they have to suit up. So they have it playing all the time, between that and the communications team scouring social media—

On the muted TV is Wilbur's apartment building.

With smoke bellowing from it, and several

The headline underneath reads: *Upper L'Manberg Apartment Complex Attacked: Four Pronounced Dead*

Techno stares. He really stares.

Then he looks down at the paper now hanging in his hands loosely.

Oh.

Kristin is now standing in front of him, he thinks she's saying something. “Techno— what's wrong?”

And of course, of course, Kristin doesn't know where Wilbur lives. How could she? Barely anyone knows where Wilbur lives because he's barely in that empty apartment he's called his home. And of course, Kristin can't understand why Techno is falling apart right now because she doesn't know that—

Techno manages to pull himself together just enough to turn towards Kristin with a twisted smile on his face. “That’s Wilbur’s apartment. Tommy was staying there last night.”

And Techno— he doesn’t try to be a pessimist, he tries to expect the worst so he’s not let down later. Right now it doesn’t even feel like too much of an exaggeration.

Wilbur’s probably dead.

And the numbness that fills his bones is enough to tell him how he feels about that.

By the time Tubbo reaches the tower, between his own ability to Google things and Schlatt’s ability to access government data base he knows a couple of things.

One. Elysium are out of the tower now, having left significant damage and most of the workers evacuated.

Two. Wilbur Soot and Thomas Underscore were caught up in the apartment explosion in Upper L’Manberg and they’re both in an Upper L’Manberg hospital, Tommy has only recently been identified and Wilbur has been in surgery for an hour or two.

Three. Phil Craft and Daniel Greyson are in a hospital in Central L’Manberg, they can’t find any information on their injuries, but they haven’t been pronounced dead, and lots of people have been pronounced dead.

Four. Tubbo doesn’t recognise any names on either of the lists of the dead from either attack, which is a small mercy in itself. No classmate from seven years back, no person he met once. He doesn’t recognise any of the names, no heroes, as far as he is aware.

Five. The chances Techno is at the tower panicking are far beyond non-zero and are in fact quite high. Tubbo would be panicking if he didn't know where any of his family was after two violent attacks apart from each other.

So...

Here he is.

He pushes through the journalists and workers crowding the building, walking in as if this place won't be where someone examines a crime scene. He is also aware the power in the building isn't working.

Neither is that stupid fucking AI.

Even from the bottom, the tower looks trashed. There's a hole in the side of it, the concrete outside is torn up. There are bullet casings on the ground, and smoke bellowing out the side of one of the holes in the building.

Someone tries to stop him as he attempts to walk into the building.

They grab onto Tubbo's shoulder.

Tubbo— straight-up panics.

His hand is popping his phone case off before he knows it, and pulling out his school ID. It's just a school ID, it doesn't give him permission to walk into anywhere.

The person glances down at his ID card.

Tubbo jerks his shoulder out of their grip, and keeps walking forwards.

He's not grabbed again.

The *shit* someone can get away with in a moment of panic.

He glances at another person guarding and he nods his head.

He gets a nod back and makes his way into the building. No one stops him as he walks forwards with a mission, he isn't *sure* on where the stairs are, but he is a pretty good guesser.

Sure enough, he finds the right stairs.

He thinks.

He doesn't have blueprints of the tower, and even if he did he couldn't just memorise them. He's not that skilled yet, although that is something he should probably do at some point. It seems useful.

Either way, he clambers up the stairs.

After about fifteen flights of stairs, Tubbo holds onto the side of the wall, this is incredibly tiring— he stands there for a few moments, huffing as he tries to get his breath back. He's not *unfit*. He's sure as fuck not fit either.

He huffs for a few moments.

“Fuckin’ stairs,” he mutters to no one in particular.

Then he turns a corner.

There's a hand on his shoulder, and Tubbo is tumbling down the stairs before he can think about much more.

He lands on the landing, it's all concrete because of *course* it is. His head hits the back of the wall, also concrete and for a moment he sees fucking stars. Everything hurts and Tubbo is *not* built for fucking combat.

He looks up at his attacker, too weak to do much, but his hands scramble to get into something that's close to a fighting position.

If he gets shot then he gets shot.

Instead, staring down at him is Techno.

And a woman with long brown hair standing next to him. She makes a noise and rushes forwards, pushing past Techno and kneeling down next to Tubbo.

Her hand brushes his hair out of his eyes slightly, and she makes a noise that sounds like sympathy. "Techno!"

"There's a dodgy kid in our stairwell, what was I supposed to—" a moment of silence, as Techno looks at him.

Tubbo doesn't think he's seen Techno since he's gotten the scar.

He must look incredibly different, hair has grown in front of his eyes to the point of detriment, a giant burn scar on the side of his face that reaches down his neck. He looks up at

Techno, managing a smile.

“Hey.”

“Tubbo?” Techno says, and he’s rushing down the few stairs and kneeling at Tubbo’s side before anything else. “What— what the fuck? Why are you here?”

“You know him?” The woman asks.

“Tubbo, this is Kristin. Kristin, Tubbo. Tubbo’s a— friend of Tommy’s. It’s complicated, what the fuck are you doing here?”

Tubbo sighs, “Okay— Wilbur and Tommy are in hospital, came here to tell you that. Daniel and Phil are in another hospital. None of them are dead as far as I’m aware, came here to tell you that— ow my head hurts.”

The relief that is present on Techno’s face is something that Tubbo has never seen on someone else’s face.

“Oh thank fuck,” Techno breathes out, “I was thinking about what flowers I’d have to get for Wilbur’s funeral.”

“What the fuck?” Kristin says.

Techno ignores Kristin for the moment, and his eyes land back on Tubbo, “You came here... to tell me that everyone is okay?”

“Well not *okay*,” Tubbo stresses, “Just— figured you wouldn’t be on top of this. ‘Cause y’know, attack. Wow, you pack a fucking punch. Hello.”

“What hospitals?” Kristin asks, she seems to have a whole brain cell which Tubbo could never manage. She still has a hold of him, just by the shoulder, there’s something worried in her eyes.

“Uh— Wilbur and Tommy are at Edgewater General Hospital. P— Daniel and Phil are at St Vincent’s. Wilbur went in for surgery— don’t ask how I know that, it’s illegal. And— I dunno about Tommy.”

Techno’s face seems to drain of even more blood.

“Oh my fucking god,” Techno eventually manages. “Do you know the injuries, is he alive? Tubbo, is my brother alive?”

“I don’t fucking know!” Tubbo bursts out, “I’m not a miracle worker. They haven’t pronounced him dead— that might mean jackshit though. He’s a hero, they might be waiting for permission from Phil or you or the hero committee, I don’t know how heroes dying works!”

Techno takes a deep breath, “White lilies.”

“What?” Kristin says.

Tubbo hates how quickly he gets it, that Techno is trying to latch onto one thing he might be able to control right now. What flowers he might have to get for Wilbur’s funeral. Techno can’t control if Wilbur is alive or dead, but he can control what flowers he would buy, even for a hypothetical funeral.

“We need a plan,” Tubbo eventually says, he looks at Techno, Tubbo doesn’t really know why he looks at Techno, why he trusts Techno to make a plan— Tubbo’s always a plan guy, and now he’s looking at an adult who looks about three seconds away from either a panic attack or sobbing forever.

Still, Tubbo has to be in awe a little bit, and he almost lets himself respect the general aura of knowing shit that Techno seems to have around him. Tubbo is also pretty sure he didn't have that last time.

What character arc has Tubbo missed in like—

A few months?

Techno takes a deep breath, closing his eyes and pinching the bridge of his nose.

They're all quiet for a long moment.

"Okay," Techno opens his eyes again, "Kristin— I need you to go to... Tubbo, where's Phil?"

"St. Vincent's."

"I need you to go there," Techno says, "I— if you don't want to, that's okay but—"

"I will," Kristin says, "Bring them back to Edgewater?"

Techno nods, "I'll go there for Wilbur and Tommy and— try figure out what the fuck is going on there, I'll call you with an update—" Techno's eyes land on Tubbo. "Oh."

Tubbo just gives him a look.

"What do you want to do?" Techno asks, "If you want to come with me or Kristin or—"

Tubbo looks at Techno for a long moment, only tilting his head, “I mean— I have class in two hours.”

Techno just looks at him flatly.

There’s almost a smile on his face, “You’re a nerd.”

“Yup!”

Techno hesitates for a few moments, “Can you— keep checking to make sure they haven’t pronounced Wilbur dead?”

Tubbo nods, because of course he does. Techno is both terrifying and sure of himself and should probably hate him, if Tubbo is being completely honest.

Techno’s eyes land on the burn mark on Tubbo’s face for a few moments, before managing to meet Tubbo’s eyes. “Are you okay?”

Tubbo moves his fringe in front of that side of his face, refusing to meet Techno’s eyes, “I am fine now,” he doesn’t need to look up to see Techno’s doubtful look, because right now there are bigger things to worry about than the both of them.

“If you want,” Techno almost offers, “I can teach you how to fight.”

“We have more to worry about now—”

“Just think about it,” Techno says, he claps Tubbo on the shoulder, “Thank you—”

Kristin and Techno rush down more stairs, at a speed that Tubbo would almost let himself be impressed by if he wasn't so fucking exhausted.

Tubbo is left standing in the stairwell, half dreading having to climb down all the stairs again. He leans against the wall for a moment.

Huh.

Techno's pretty good at that, making people not feel like shit. Also ignoring all his own feelings, Tubbo has noticed that Techno seems to be one of the repressing variety.

Most good leaders tend to be to some degree.

Tubbo might even take him up on that offer, learning how to fight.

Another deep breath, then Tubbo turns around and starts going down the stairs too.

Thanks to the help of Tubbo, Techno shows up at the right hospital like a tornado. He gets no more updates about Wilbur from Tubbo, so he assumes that the world doesn't know if his brother is dead or not.

He talks to people, he gets dragged to the right place quickly.

It's a flurry of movement and talking to people.

There is relief in the fact that Tommy is okay, it floods Techno's body almost completely. If Tommy's okay, that probably means Wilbur's okay and then everything will be okay and Techno won't lose his fucking mind.

Tommy looks injured, but he seems okay. He will be okay—

It's Wilbur who isn't okay. Techno almost feels his heart drop out of his chest at this, Wilbur hooked up to— too many machines. Techno's been here before, he's seen this shit before with Wilbur on the verge of death.

And logically he *knows* Wilbur is alive.

He knows Wilbur is still breathing as he explains what happened to Tommy, and Tommy tries to explain what happened on his end, and then he bursts out into tears.

Logically, Wilbur is alive and breathing.

That doesn't stop the fact that he looks like a corpse.

Techno sits there silently, chewing on his hand as Wilbur is in the bed. Tommy has his own hospital bed just across and he knows that they're going to try to get Phil in here as well.

Tommy is asleep in the chair, leaning towards Wilbur who doesn't lean back.

Techno keeps chewing on his hand, it's a bad habit that he's wanted to break— just about all of his life, but he's anxious all the time and so hasn't had time to be able to cut that out of his life.

It's moments like these where Techno isn't sure if he's gotten much older than the anxious kid that escaped the fighting rings, it's moments like these where he's not sure if he's much older than Wilbur with his stupid protective stances when they were younger.

Every time Wilbur gets hurt, Techno feels younger.

It's hard to remember that Wilbur is older than him, and it sure as fuck doesn't feel like that sometimes.

Techno sighs, leaning back in his chair.

Tommy is snoring softly.

It's darker outside, it's been an incredibly long day and Wilbur hasn't woken up, and that dreadful, dreadful voice in the back of his head says that he might not wake up at all. That evil part in his brain dooms him to thinking about this path.

This world, where Wilbur is not in his life.

He hates it.

That's what Techno decides.

Tommy breaks the uneasy silence that has formed over them.

"I never told him I was Theseus..." Tommy whispers, he still has his legs hugged so tightly to his chest it looks like he's going to explode from the pressure. "I mean— I wasn't going to but just—"

"The option might be gone," Techno says with a nod.

Tommy stares at Wilbur for a moment longer, and Techno is pretty sure that Phil and Kristin have gone to find food.

Then Tommy starts crying, silent tears streaming down his face as he clamps a hand over his mouth.

"He'll be fine," Techno stands up and walks over to Tommy, crouching down and looking at him. "Wil— he'll be fine."

"You can't just— just say that shit," Tommy says, tears still streaming down his face, "We both know he might not be, life support doesn't always work and—"

"Ventilators have high rates of success," Techno says gently, "And— it's Wilbur, he's survived some pretty serious shit."

"He told me about Eret," Tommy whispers, tears still rolling down his face. "And— shit. And —"

"He survived that, and he survived being impaled in the leg that one time."

"The what?"

Techno just glances at Tommy for a moment, before looking back at Wilbur. "Uh— this is the third time this has happened... it's some sort of sick irony. He got impaled through the leg in the— November 16th apartment collapse."

Tommy stares at him for a few moments, mouth open. "You were involved in that?"

"Mhm."

"Well, fuck," Tommy murmurs. He looks back at Wilbur and something in his expression breaks a little bit, Techno watches as it breaks a little bit and he wants nothing more than to hug this poor kid.

This poor kid.

"Y'know. One of his first responses when there was a fucking bomb was to shield me," and Tommy says it like it's a crime. Like it's an awful thing that Wilbur would want to have protected him.

And *of course*, Wilbur wanted to protect Tommy, and of course, he did it well because he's Wilbur and he's been training his entire life to protect other people and Techno would do the same time and time again, even if it wasn't Tommy. But especially because it is Tommy.

Tommy sighs.

"Alright," Techno says, grabbing Tommy by the shoulders, "Kid, you need to understand something, because Wilbur is the exact same— this is not your fault, not in any way."

"That's one of the last things he said to me," Tommy whispers, "He— he told me everything would be okay and he— and—" he takes in a shuddering breath. "Some of his last fucking words were to make sure I wouldn't blame myself and I still am and—"

"You can't do that to yourself, Toms," the nickname slips so easily, so much like Wilbur that both of them pause for a moment. "Alright, Wilbur made his decisions and you made yours—and I know he is not mad at you. Like how you're not mad at him. What if the situation was reversed?"

Tommy just stares at him, "Wilbur— Wilbur wouldn't have let it get this bad."

Then he starts crying again.

Ah.

“Okay,” Techno says, “Do you need a hug?”

And secretly he needs Tommy to want a hug, Techno needs a hug, it feels like he’s breaking at the edges and Phil isn’t here and he can’t break down in front of Phil because he has to be strong right now.

No one else is trying to be strong, and that’s Techno’s job.

He literally has super strength, it’s his job to be strong.

But still, he needs a hug, and Wilbur gives the best hugs but that doesn’t fucking matter because he might die anyway and—

He hopes Tommy wants a hug.

Tommy nods his head, and Techno wraps his arms around Tommy. Holding him close because it feels like everything is falling apart again and Techno wants to say and do a lot of things and—

All he can do is hug Tommy.

He hears footsteps behind him, and without even turning he knows it’s Phil, stumbling slightly and he thinks there are people with him, maybe a nurse, maybe Kristin, maybe both.

Techno doesn’t turn around, he doesn’t let go of Tommy either.

And he can almost see the way Phil recoils, he can hear it.

It’s the same no matter who’s in the hospital.

“Wil—” Phil whispers, and there’s something impossibly heavy in the air around them. Phil basically stumbles to Wilbur’s bedside, staring at him with wide eyes and breathing heavily.

Techno wants to look away.

He doesn’t.

“What happened to you?” Phil whispers gently, he picks up Wilbur’s hand and clasps it tight.

And the gentleness in Phil’s voice makes Techno want to sob forever.

He turns around to look at Techno. “Is he going to—”

Techno glances at Tommy, who he’s still holding onto, he’s looking at Techno with the same tear-filled eyes that Phil is giving him.

“We don’t know if he has brain damage,” Techno says, “They think he was without oxygen for a while. They don’t know if— if we can take him off life support. If his lungs will keep like— y’know breathing.”

Matter of fact.

Emotionless.

Techno has far removed himself from the situation.

It’s just facts.

Things the nurses have told him in hushed tones since Techno is clearly the one keeping it together out of himself and Tommy. Now Phil's here, he might get left out of the loop.

Wilbur's ribs were crushed by concrete, it's more than possible that he went several minutes without oxygen, leading to brain damage. He is alive... although it's hard to tell if his heart wants to keep beating on its own accord if his lungs are rising and falling of their own choice or if he's forced to keep breathing.

And he knows Wilbur wants to live.

He *knows* Wilbur wants to live because he has a lot of shit he wants to do, and Techno wants to watch his older brother get older— and he doesn't want to have to get older than Wilbur.

Is he going to have to get older than Wilbur?

Techno stares straight ahead.

Kristin has managed to find Phil a chair, and she's standing behind the chair, the same heartbroken, unbelieving expression on her face.

No one speaks out of fear that saying something will shatter this all, shatter the fact that Wilbur is still alive and breathing, he's on life support— a ventilator is what is making his lungs rise and fall but... he's still alive.

The world moves on around them, and Techno thinks he hates it. That the world keeps spinning and other people don't know that Wilbur's life hangs in the balance of some force that he doesn't know. He hates it.

He hates it.

Phil is the first to break the silence again, Techno knows he's not supposed to hear it. "I don't want to have to bury him," he says it to Kristin, not Techno, in a voice so small that Techno doesn't know what to do.

Tommy just sighs.

Techno starts trying to sort through his thoughts. He's used to having to be the strongest person in a situation— this appears to be one of those scenarios. The facts...

Wilbur might die. He's on life support.

Wilbur might live, he has enough of a chance that they're giving him life support. They probably found Wilbur after a suitable amount of time being underneath the rubble, so they're not sure he won't wake up.

After long enough Phil and Techno might have to make a decision about pulling life support, they won't, of course, but it's still something they might have to tell someone. Phil will pull out of work for a while— Tommy won't have much work until the tower is fixed.

Someone has to fix the tower.

Someone has to manage that— and the investigation of... however this happened. Techno already knows that he will be doing as much as he can for that. He needs this all to be documented.

Okay.

A plan, a road ahead. Regardless of if Wilbur wakes up or not.

Part of him hates the coldness of this plan, but another part of him knows this is what he needs right now. He needs the next steps. He needs things to be able to do next and this— is

that he supposes.

There's a long beep that snaps Techno out of his thoughts.

He lets go of Tommy.

Techno looks over at all the various machines attached to Wilbur.

It's his heart monitor making the noise.

Wilbur's flatlining.

"Fucking—" Techno stands up, rushing over and slamming the button next to Wilbur's bed, hopefully calling for a nurse or— anyone.

He's flatlining— Wilbur's flatlining.

Stay calm.

Calmnoblade

GUYS HIS BROTHER IS FLATLINING MAYBE LET'S NOT

If I was Wilbur, I would personally not stand for this.

NOT SUPER HELPFUL RN

"We need a nurse!" Techno yells because he knows how to do CPR but he'd really rather not do it. He doesn't know how phantom anatomy works or if he can break Wilbur's ribs again or —

Someone comes rushing in, takes one look at the situation and runs over to Wilbur.

"Oh shit." They say.

And Techno has never done much medical, but holy fuck it can not be good if the nurse is swearing.

He takes a few steps backwards, grabbing onto Tommy and pulling him onto his seat.

More people rush in.

Techno can only stare as he prays for these people to save his brother's life. They talk about surgery and electric shocks and *why* is his heart failing and Phantoms and biology and it all washes over Techno.

Tommy has a grip on his shoulder.

Today is easily in his top three worst days.

Chapter End Notes

when I'm in a
ADOPTING TRAUMATISED CONCERNING
CHILDREN FROM LOGSTEDCHIRE
competition and my
opponent is TINA!TECHNO



Chapter Summary

- Tubbo meets Guqqie! A uni student at the uni he gets extra credit at, he sees that the hero tower has been attacked and immediately rushes out to sort this shit out because he knows people get panicky and dumb.
 - After a fight with Sam, Techno gets permission to train both Aimsey and Sniff, two powerful new hero recruits, but Shubble and Techno are co-training Sniff. Aimsey embarrassed Sam by knocking him on his ass
 - Quackity and Techno walk out of there amused about the entire thing, they talk for a bit before Sam grabs Techno (Techno almost puts a knife through Sam's hand), Sam threatens basically all of SBI. Quackity is like "my fucking god back off wtf is wrong with you." And Sam backs off
 - Quackity, Fundy, Purpled and Techno hole up on the SBI floor, where they eat chips and generally have a good time. That is quickly interrupted by an explosion that shakes the entire building and OH DEAR!!!!
 - Fundy and Quackity split off, saying moving in a larger group is a bad idea and Techno agrees. So Purpled and Techno have some shenanigans trying to get people out. It's fun!
 - They find Kristin and Phil pinned with guns and they sort that out. Phil gets shot in the shoulder and Purpled gets shot in the stomach and freaks out about it. They both go to hospital.
 - Techno goes back up stairs with Kristin, after them fighting and accusing both about doing it. They give up and go upstairs and Techno finds out Wilbur's apartment blew up! He freaks out a little bit about that!
 - Techno makes it to the hospital and everything is upsetting, meanwhile Techno and co. are having a crisis and then Wilbur's heart monitor indicates that he is FUCKING FLATLINING! And Techno calls a nurse
-

This is a reference that beyond half of you won't get, but when Sniff uses their powers I imagine it to be similar to how Laudna (from Critical Role) uses her magic. Hi. It's been a while, I have no justification as to why and guess what. I DON'T NEED ONE!!! I was busy and didn't want to write, that simple

SEE YOU NEXT CHAPTER!!!!

the present runs into the past, it becomes entwined

Chapter Summary

Then came the entire hero thing— for fuck's sake, he watched his friends, with families, die.

Phil had no desire to be ripped from the hypothetical child that he was raising, had no desire for them to watch him buried in the ground before the kid was able to grow up. That was something Phil dealt with.

He wouldn't raise a kid just to die and leave the kid alone.

And then at the ripe old age of fucking twenty one he got a call.

or, we get a surprising insight into phil's brain, purpled's dodgy situation and the anemoi crew are born!

Chapter Notes

Warnings: medical talk, talks of death, injuries, implied/referenced abuse, talks of medication (antidepressant withdrawals and being high on pain medication)

as always. summary at the end, be careful my lovelies

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Phil never wanted kids.

Even from when he was very young, teachers at school would try to push— some weird sort of agenda by talking about when they would grow up and have kids. Phil knew that he didn't want kids.

It was just something that never really— appealed to him. To be responsible for a whole other person? A person with hopes and dreams and their own flaws? All of that was not something Phil wanted.

Being a father was something he never wanted for himself.

He was more okay with— being a cool uncle, despite his lack of siblings, or something different. That appealed to him. He didn't hate kids or anything, he thought they were really funny, but— just not to raise. Was it commitment issues?

Maybe.

Was it the terrifying realisation that he wouldn't be enough for a child and his only examples of parenting came from the worst person alive or his long-dead parents who never got a chance to raise a teenager?

Yup.

That was a big part of it.

Then came the entire hero thing— and the fifty percent death rate of most heroes, especially in the first couple of years. While Phil was past his first couple of years by the time he left (well... sorta), it was still a statistic loud in his mind.

For fuck's sake, he watched his friends, with families, die.

He watched people mourn his friends, wives and husbands and kids and girlfriends and—

Phil had no desire to be ripped from the hypothetical child that he was raising, had no desire for them to watch him buried in the ground before the kid was able to grow up. That was something Phil dealt with.

He wouldn't raise a kid just to die and leave the kid alone.

His entire life, Phil didn't want kids.

And then at the ripe old age of fucking *twenty one* he got a call.

He almost didn't pick up the call at all.

William Nelson-Jones the name itself made panic rise in Phil's gut, he should have known better than to pick up a call from that man. He was smarter than that, he had to be smarter than that. But at the end of the day, Phil wasn't strong enough to not respond.

He picked up the phone, his hands were shaking.

Phil remembered that.

How he was so shaky he could barely think, and he barely heard the words in his ear as he was spoken to. He remembered his panic of being spoken to by William better than what was actually said.

Looking back he barely remembered how he got to the police station.

Only that there was a kid at the police station.

He was sitting on one of the chairs, trying to make himself as small as possible.

Phil wanted to snap at the officer looking at him, Phil was twenty-one, there was no good reason that he should be taking care of this child. He didn't *want kids*, he didn't want any of this. There were families perfectly capable and wanting to take care of a kid and—

He had wings.

Phil saw that when the kid looked up just before he was about to start yelling about how this entire thing was bullshit. He paused completely.

The kid had two wings.

And *oh* that was why he was here.

That's why William had sent him here.

And so, began the fatherhood that Phil never wanted for himself.

Then came the flurry of his life after Wilbur, trying to parent him and trying to care for him while trying to keep his job stable and not die most days on the job. Trying to take care of Wilbur, always trying to take care of Wilbur. Then Techno and then Eret and everything—

Everything.

His life. All of it.

Techno being a snarky little shit and never really growing out of it, Wilbur being bright like the sun until he wasn't. Eret who managed to worm their way into Phil's heart, in a spot right next to his two other kids and then shatter that part inside of him.

And he didn't want this.

He never wanted any of this.

That being said, he doesn't regret it.

He would do it all again in a heartbeat, he'd go through everything all over again just for another chance to love his kids again. He would move mountains and destroy worlds for them, and Phil never thought he could care about someone the way he does his kids.

He never thought his heart would be built for it.

But it's built for it.

He remembers when he was little, back when his parents were alive. They had very little, and Phil would learn to get used to this, but he looked up at his father one night. He was home from work, and his mum was out instead.

Tiny Phil was being put to bed.

He remembered that his bed was second hand, and the springs in the mattress were falling apart.

"What's it like?" Phil had asked, very gently, in a voice that was barely his own. His hand grabbing onto his dad's arm. *"To be a dad?"*

His dad had smiled down at him, he looked tired the way he always did. Wrinkles and a furrow in his brow that never really left, tough hands from a lifetime of hauling things on the dock and fishing and providing for people even when he could barely provide for themselves.

Phil had looked up at his dad, and back then he swore that his dad knew everything.

"Well," he had said, with a deep sigh, *"I didn't think my heart was big enough to love anyone as much as I love you. And I got to watch you, go from a tiny baby—you were no bigger than my arm!"*

“What?” Phil had asked, the shock dripping from his voice in the way that it could only do a child. *“I was never that small!”*

“You were!” His dad responded with a smile, brushing the hair out of Phil’s eyes. *“You were so small, and I got to watch you grow. And I’ll get to watch you grow into a beautiful person, into a kind man, I get to watch you become yourself and there is nothing more that I want to do.”*

His dad smoothed back more of his hair, and Phil smiled lazily up at him, eyes fluttering shut.

“I used to be so scared when you were little,” he whispered , *“With wings— and health problems, and there was so much that could’ve gone wrong. You were sick a lot as a baby, and I was so scared for you.”*

“But I was fine, Pa,” Phil had responded, mumbly, his words barely coming out separately and instead slurring into one jumbled mess. *“I’m okay!”*

“I know, I’m not scared anymore,” his dad had whispered , *“Because you are a bright, clever boy, and I know— whatever you do, you’re going to be okay. And I’ll get to watch you.”*

Phil hadn’t understood the weight of the words at the time.

He was six.

Six-year-olds didn’t tend to understand much about anything, let alone the feelings of parenthood and the joy of getting to watch their child grow.

Years later, when Wilbur was twelve and sitting on the arm of the couch instead of the actual couch. He was talking about something— Phil doesn’t remember later on. Probably history, knowing Wilbur.

Phil was hit with the same realisation.

That he'd get to watch Wilbur grow, and become someone and he would get to help him and he'd get to watch him become— himself. A good person, a good man, someone that Phil would be proud of until the day he died. Not a perfect person, but a person that Phil would be proud of. A person who would grow and change and—

There was nothing else that Phil would rather be around to see. To see Wilbur grow.

His father's words echoed around in his head.

Finally they made sense.

That things wouldn't always be easy for Wilbur. Something about Wilbur seemed to just invite trouble, but Phil knew he'd be okay. He knew that Wilbur was smart and strong and he could get through a lot alone.

But he would never have to do anything alone.

And then Techno, and the same realisation and—

One day, when both Techno and Wilbur were eighteen. The part of the year where they were the same age, before Wilbur got older and then became insufferable about it.

He remembered it, Techno grabbing Wilbur and dragging him out of a press conference. This wasn't the first time, it wouldn't be the last, but it was different this time because Phil was hit with the realisation that—

This was them grown up.

Protecting each other, loving each other.

Phil had watched them grow up, and he was so proud of them.

So Phil excused himself from the press conference, and then he started crying in his office. Because there was this pride in his chest that he didn't know how to get out into the world, because those were his kids, and they would be alright.

They'd be okay.

...

And now, Phil is sitting at the bedside of his oldest son.

And for the second time in his life, he's thinking about the fact he might have to bury his son.

He already did it once, and he doesn't know how he got through that, how he survived thinking Wilbur was dead for as long as he did. He doesn't know how he survived his parents being buried, he doesn't know how he survived his friends being buried.

He doesn't know what he's going to do if the place Wilbur has carved out in his heart over— years and years and late night conversations and laughing and bad games of tag and promises and— he doesn't know what he's going to do if that part of him gets buried in the ground with Wilbur.

There's talks of taking Wilbur off life support. There's talks of Phil resigning, there's talks of so much and Phil can barely concentrate on any of it because Wilbur is in hospital and none of the doctors seem confident he will survive.

And Phil is drowning.

He doesn't know how well put together he looks for Techno and Tommy and Daniel. He doesn't know how much he looks like he's holding it together— he thinks it must be alright because Techno seems to hate him for it.

It's a week in.

A week since Wilbur was dragged out of his collapsed apartment and his lungs had also collapsed.

Tommy is there, because of course he is.

Phil can't concentrate on much, so for the first time since Phil met him, he looks at Tommy, actually looks at him.

Tommy looks tired, he looks slightly hurt still. His eyes are constantly flickering back and forth between Wilbur, heart monitors and anything else there. He seems tense in hospitals, that isn't new, Phil's noticed that before, he thinks.

They barely talk when they're both alone. Normally Techno and Tommy, or Phil and Techno lead a conversation.

Phil knows he hasn't had that much to do with Tommy.

When Wilbur had come to him all that time ago, *it hasn't been that long* . It just feels like a lifetime. By the time Wilbur had come to Phil, a smile on his face and light in his eyes as he explained why they should hire one *Thomas Underscore*, Phil was long done with parenting in the way someone has to when it's a child or teenager.

Tommy...

He's not like Wilbur or Techno; no person is the same. He's louder and brighter and hiding something Phil really wants to push but knows better than to push and...

At first he doesn't spend a lot of time around the kid by accident, he's just busy a lot, being the head of SBI is fine, it just means he has more paperwork and meetings and less time to talk and hang out with Tommy.

Then the gala happens.

He's the one who has to take Techno, Tommy, Daniel and Niki back to his house and—

The expression on Tommy.

He knows that expression.

He's seen it on Wilbur's face far too many times to ignore, he knows— he knows what that expression led to and he knows what happened after that and he knows he should push or talk to Tommy privately but...

Tommy isn't his kid.

And he can't save everyone and he's tried this before and he—

Tommy reminds him so much of Wilbur it makes him physically want to throw up, the few times that they do spend together— Swinter or when Tommy beats the shit out of him (an iconic moment) or Phil makes a nest.

It reminds him of Wilbur.

The way his smile drops when no one's looking.

The way his shoulders slump and something glazes over in his eyes and Phil wants to ask Techno or Wilbur who are far closer with the kid if they've noticed this, his spaciness and the way his smile tends to drop but...

He doesn't say anything.

And... he thinks a part of him deep down just hoped that if he ignored it, if he just chalked it up to paranoia or overthinking or something else— then it didn't make it real.

Then Tommy was fine and history wasn't repeating like a cruel joke and everything would be fine.

So... Phil tries to avoid Tommy after that, not a lot, he won't leave a room if Tommy is there or anything, he won't disclude him from anything. They just don't talk one on one a lot, and Tommy seems more than fine with that idea.

Phil knows he shouldn't feel relief at that.

He does.

The guilt manages to eat away any relief he may have convinced himself he had.

Phil thought he was done with parenting the way one has to parent a teenager. His kids were in their mid-twenties, both were independent and competent, and both were prodigies and that in itself made him feel sick.

Yes, he still parented them, of course, he did.

But Tommy was another thing entirely, a reminder of Wilbur from a different time, a reminder of how abysmal Phil had been as a parent then, and he clearly wasn't looking to change it.

So, he avoided Tommy.

Now he's harder to avoid.

Both Techno and Wilbur have a Tommy-sized shape in their hearts, Phil knows it. He knows how much his sons care for Tommy, and by default that means Phil brings himself to care for Tommy as well. It's not as deep as the other two, he knows that, but it's still a lot.

And right now?

Tommy is impossible to ignore.

He's there with Wilbur most days, and when Tommy isn't there, Daniel is. Or Tommy is running damage control on social media, or he is being good. He's not productive with his grief the same way Daniel is.

But he cares so much.

Phil can see that easily, the deep care Tommy holds around him like it's nothing. Sitting on the ends of beds talking about nothing, sitting on the chair near Wilbur's bed, shaking head to toe. All of it— all of it.

It's the pair of them a lot. Techno is dealing with his own feelings and the fact he is slightly insufferable to be around. Daniel actually still has work, Phil's wing is still too busted to go to work.

So it's Phil and Tommy a lot.

He looks over at Tommy, tearing his eyes away from the window that he's become so familiar with over this past week.

And Tommy—

Tommy.

He's hunched over himself, almost folded. He's leaning far forwards and his hair is obscured by the light.

Wilbur is hunched in chair, shoulders downwards and face obscured by how far he's leaning forwards. He's folded over himself, just... staring at his hands.

Wilbur is shaking, his hands are covered in blood. His suit is too and there's blood in his hair. None of the blood is his own, and Phil feels a sick sort of gladness about it all. It's not his son who was hurt, it was everyone else.

"Wil," Phil says late one night.

Wilbur looks up at him.

"It wasn't your fault."

He's seventeen. He just watched five people die in front of him.

"How?" He whispers, "I'm the hero. I save people."

Phil has a lot of things he doesn't say that day. He doesn't say that Wilbur is human before he is a hero. He doesn't say that he's a teenager before he's a hero, that he's Phil's son before he's a hero. But... he doesn't have the courage to say any of it, he doesn't want to hear Wilbur disagree with him, confirm Phil's worst fears that all he thinks he's good for is being a shield for other people.

Instead, he hugs him. It says something.

It doesn't say enough.

He didn't say anything Wilbur needed to hear that night, he might regret that for the rest of his life. But Wilbur wasn't the one that he could help right now, it was the kid, sitting on the chair folded over himself, grief on his face.

There's so much that Tommy needs to hear. That he's loved, that Phil knows this was Wilbur's decision, he needs to apologise for letting himself be distant from Tommy, he needs to say a lot of things.

He doesn't know how many of them will be heard right now.

Instead, he places the sandwich tray down and Tommy doesn't even bother looking up at him.

He's holding his own stomach across the middle, self-comforting, Phil knows it well and rocking back and forth slightly. His eyes are blurry and—

Phil can't just ignore this, he can't pass it off onto Techno or Daniel, both who probably know how to deal with this better. Phil isn't perfect, but he's here now, and that has to be worth at least something.

He drags the closest chair over, sitting next to Tommy. He almost reaches out to touch him, the way he would with Wilbur if Wilbur was doing this. But Tommy is not Wilbur, and Phil doesn't know if that's okay.

So he doesn't.

"My parents never taught me how to preen my wings," Phil says, and he's not sure why this is the route he's going down. He never talked to Techno or Wilbur about this sort of stuff—maybe it's the fact Tommy's an avian, maybe Phil knows how to talk about his own parents ten years since he tried to have the conversations with his kids. "I was very young when they died—neither of them *had* wings, so I had to figure it out myself. They were both poor dock workers from Logstedchire, I don't know how I got to a place where I'm sitting here. They cared a lot for me—"

What he doesn't say is that he hopes they'd be proud of the person he'd become.

He doesn't know if they would be.

They were kind, perhaps to their own detriment, and Phil doesn't know if he inherited that. He hopes he did, but he just doesn't know. He wants to but he can't, it's an unknowable thing, to know if your parents would be proud of you.

It's hard enough to know when they are alive and watched you become the person you did.

It's even harder when they're both not around and haven't been for longer than they were alive.

"Wil never got to meet his grandparents, but I know they'd love him. Techno didn't get to meet them either, but they'd also adore him. I'm not sure if you had grandparents that you can remember but my grandparents used to make these really bad cookies. Nana couldn't bake at all and—"

“I met my nan, once,” Tommy’s voice is quiet, and he’s looking at Phil like Phil is some sort of threat.

Phil knows better than to let it sting, but still, there’s a pang in his chest as Tommy recoils away from him a little bit, looking out the other side of his chair. Turning his head away from Phil as he tries to recollect himself.

“Mum and Dad had a falling out with her, when I was about three. But— they wanted me to meet her, so I met her. She... I don’t remember a lot about her, I remember her hands were gentle and she smiled a lot.”

Phil lets a small smile creep across his face.

“I love— loved her a lot. The one time I met her was amazing, she sent me money and letters after that. I don’t have them anymore, but she treated me like I was hers and— I guess I was.”

“Is she still alive?”

“I don’t know,” Tommy murmurs, closing his eyes and sighing deeply. “I hope so. I had aunts and uncles and cousins and great-aunts. I just— never met most of them, I think I’d like to, one day. When I forgive them.”

“Forgive them?”

“For letting the abuse slide,” Tommy adds darkly, and Phil can’t even start to describe the expression on Tommy’s face. Grief and anger and betrayal and just... just *hurt* to a level that Phil hasn’t seen in a long time. “They knew. Too many of them knew, and the didn’t do anything. I— want to forgive them.”

“I can’t forgive them,” Techno screams one day, his voice hoarse from screaming and an argument that Phil wasn’t a part of. “They— after all of this they fuckin’ ran off and left me

to rot. I can't forgive them!"

"You don't have to," Phil had responded.

"You don't need to," Phil responds, as gently as he can, with the vision of Techno ranting and screaming that one night almost flooding his mind. "You never have to forgive people for hurting you. For leaving you to rot."

Tommy laughs, a small thing, he glances at Phil, then at Wilbur. "I know. I want to. I can't carry my resentment forever, it's not healthy."

"You're pretty smart."

"Had some pretty smart people help me along the way," Tommy draws his legs up to his chest and hugs them tightly. He makes himself smaller, almost impossibly so.

They settle into the silence that has so often become how they do things, the pair of them, barely talking and instead drowning in their own thoughts. Phil knows that feeling and he's rather sick of it.

"I got adopted," Phil says, "When I was ten."

Tommy looks at him, mouth slightly open. "Oh?"

"Yeah," Phil sighs, looking at Wilbur. "I guess technically— legally, that's Wilbur's granddad. He's a pretty shitty granddad. Even implying he's related to me makes me feel gross, he's a terrible person and I hate him."

"I was almost adopted," Tommy adds, "Fostered, technically— I got fostered for a while and thought I'd be adopted. Wasn't. Got kicked out. I think I hate him for that a little bit, but I know why. Still— not a fan."

Phil nods knowingly.

They both grew up poor. Both apparently were betrayed by someone who was supposed to care for them. Both Logstedchire born and raised and both were somehow in a position where they never were supposed to be. Weird relationships with adoption and parents and extended family and—

It's similar.

This entire time Phil thought he had been staring at a version of Wilbur.

But even Tommy's light hair told a different story. Golden hair and bright blue eyes compared to Phil's platinum blond hair, with streaks of white starting to run through it, and his paler blue eyes.

This feels more like a mirror.

Phil looks back at Tommy, and Tommy is looking directly back at him.

A mirror. This poor boy is a mirror of *him*.

Aimsey isn't sure how she ends up like this, standing with her arms crossed glaring at the TV in front of her. They've been shoved into a hotel nearby, because it's *wild* how that works when the place you're working and living gets blown up.

Both Sniff and him are stuck in a pretty nice hotel, all things considered. There are two beds and a giant TV, and Sniff also brought a Nintendo Switch, so overall it's a rather successful

time. Considering— well, everything.

But Aimsey has forgotten all of that.

There's rage as xe stares at the TV.

Jenkins.

Fucking *Jenkins*.

Aimsey doesn't think they've ever hated someone as much as they do this *fucker*. Aimsey can barely pay attention as the TV plays, and his stupid fucking voice echoes throughout the room.

"I am announcing constant surveillance in Logstedchire in order to catch the criminals who deceive our nation over and over again."

Jenkins gives a smile that makes Aimsey want to start throwing things at the TV. *"After the hate-driven attack on the Heroes Tower, the shining beacon of our nation, the security on Logstedchire from both heroes, cameras and outside personnel will be increased."*

"You're kidding," Aimsey mutters. "Shining beacon? Shining out of your fucking ass—"

"Gatherings of beyond six people within Logstedshire have also been banned and any gatherings beyond that who are not from the same household or while at jobs will be given a significant fine. This, while not our preferred course of action, must be done for the betterment of L'Manberg as a whole."

Sniff is also watching the TV quietly, their eyes narrowed at it.

“Details regarding these updates shall be released soon. And of course, if you’re not doing anything wrong, you have nothing to worry about.”

“That’s just blatant anti-protesting rulings,” Sniff says, holding a yoghurt cup in her hand, they lean back slightly. “It’s almost smart.”

Aimsey nods, they don’t say anything but grit their teeth.

“These protocols in Logstedchire, while drastic are important to uphold the peace. Elysium leeches into every corner there, we must stop this virus from killing all of us. If that requires some... rough handling of the host body, then it is what must be done.”

“This is so fucked up!” Aimsey yells.

There’s rage building, Aimsey can feel it in his hands.

“I know right?” Sniff says, “They don’t have any more of the good yoghurt.”

Aimsey turns around to give Sniff a sharp look.

Sniff sighs, looking down at the shitty yoghurt tub before having another spoonful of it, “Right? There are no mango chunks in it, at that point what’s the point?”

Aimsey gives Sniff another look, this one is filled with more contempt.

Sniff just shrugs, “What’s botherin’ you now Aimsey?”

“Everything!” Aimsey gestures at the TV, “They’re fucking... blaming Logstedchire for this! Surely not everyone in Elysium is from Logstedchire? There’s no point in doing that! It’s just

an excuse to kick down an already kicked group of people.”

Sniff squints up at the TV, she crosses her legs and watches the TV a bit closer. “I mean, I’m not overly shocked by this—”

Aimsey sighs, sitting down on the couch next to Sniff.

“So...” Sniff looks at Aimsey, “What are we gonna do about it?”

“Huh?”

“Well... we can’t just watch them shit on our home forever. What are we gonna do about this? This room isn’t bugged— we’re in a hotel.”

Aimsey looks at the TV and then back at Sniff. “There’s... not a heap we can do, we’re just two people...”

Sniff sits back in their seat. “Technoblade was only one person and he got the president to resign and several cabinet members to because they were all scared of him. Elysium would’ve started with one person.”

Silence.

“Are you really gonna let *Technoblade* achieve more political change at fourteen than us at eighteen?”

“I dunno...” Aimsey crosses their arms, “I have ideas but— they’re just ideas. We need someone outside of the tower, we’re being monitored.”

“That crush of yours—”

“She is *not* —”

“Look, isn’t she part of a university organisation group?”

Aimsey nods.

“She was there at the protest that you got arrested at, right?” Sniff asks and Aimsey nods.
“That’s our out. Yeah, we’re being monitored, but not always— and with someone y’know, on the outside.”

Aimsey stares ahead, straight at the TV, people are talking about the benefits of these new rules. Discussing this like it won’t ruin lives, Aimsey just watches. There’s a rage underneath their skin and they have no plans on letting it die.

This rage is cold, it fills their veins with ice. They can barely think because everything is cold with rage, she can’t think, she can barely breathe because it’s nothing but... sheer anger, Aimsey doesn’t know a time when she’s been this angry.

And he’s *so* angry.

Sniff watches them for a few moments.

Neither of them says anything.

Aimsey just seethes.

Then they pick up their phone, calling Guqqie without even thinking about it.

Sniff is right.

Someone has to do *something* about this bullshit.

Why not them?

Aimsey planned on being the tower's biggest mistake.

They fucking stand by that.

George is sitting at a desk, spinning around in a chair. Sam has been ever-so kind enough to not immediately arrest him, which is good, because George might be one of the only ones with insight on— this entire situation.

He spins around on the chair a bit more.

Around and around and around, the room is spinning.

George can hear the footsteps, and he takes a deep breath to steady himself as the door slams open with an echoing noise.

Sam stands in the doorway, walking in with a fury.

George throws himself out of the seat, before moving so the desk is between him and Sam, Sam is a lot stronger than him, but George is smarter and better at being nimble, he has to hope that's enough to not get the shit beat out of him.

“What did you do?” Sam yells.

“I didn’t do jackshit!” George yells, he ducks out of the way of something being thrown at him, “I didn’t give anyone the visitation badges— don’t throw shit at me!” Sam throws another thing at him, an eraser this time.

It clatters on the wall next to him.

“You’re with Elysium,” Sam hisses underneath his breath, “And Elysium invaded the tower — please do tell me the lack of relation here!”

“It’s not me!” George snaps back, “I haven’t spoken to them since you found out— I basically quit, or was fired— I dunno! Something, that’s for sure. You really think I’m dumb enough to have this leading so directly to me?”

“Yes, I do. Or else I wouldn’t be here.”

“There’s someone else,” George hisses, “There’s another mole, I don’t know who—”

“Fucking bullshit.”

“They wouldn’t tell us who the other spies are,” George returns harshly, “Fucking would they? I’ve been on enough stealth missions to know what is what and that— that is what. What else do you fucking want from me? I don’t know who the other mole is, I don’t know how they got in!”

“I don’t believe you,” Sam says, he puts both hands on the edge of the desk, and leans forwards. George takes advantage of the gap between them, provided by the desk, and takes a step back. “George I swear to—”

“Don’t swear to anyone,” George responds harshly, “It wasn’t me— I promise you—”

“Tell me one good fucking reason I shouldn’t arrest you right here and right now.”

George has been prepared for this, since the second the door swung open, ready to give up his final cards he’s been holding against his chest. It’s about all he has left.

He pulls out a vial of blue.

“Ten mililitres,” George says, placing it onto the desk, “I can only get it in small batches, it’s not easy to get— it’ll probably take months to get fifty.”

Sam just looks at him.

“You need this, right? There’s a reason you haven’t gone in there to get it yourself.”

Sam looks down at it, then back up at George.

George shoves his hands into his pockets, one of his hands curling around the other vial in his pocket. Where he leaves it.

He shoulder-checks Sam on the way past and walks back out into the hallway.

He holds the vial in his hand tight enough that he’s scared it’ll explode into his clothes.

Now.

Who the fuck else in the tower was— or still is, working for Elysium?

Because George didn't do this, it would be way too obvious for him to do this, especially now Sam is breathing down his fucking neck. Who else? Who else is doing any of this shit?

And he takes off down the hallway, not daring to look back to see if Sam was watching him.

“My ma would've loved you,” Phil says one night.

He's not sure why he says it, he rarely talks about his parents, something that both Wilbur and Techno know very well. This must be shocking enough because Techno's eyes go wide before he hesitates and keeps on eating.

They're not in the hospital for once, they've decided that Wilbur can spend the night alone for the first time in two weeks. That they'll be called if anything changes, Wilbur's been stable for a while now.

Instead, they're sitting in Phil's house, around the coffee table.

None of them are on the couch, even Techno has decided the floor would be better for all of them. They're eating dumplings, a lot of them, more dumplings than they should be eating, but none of them care.

Tommy pauses mid-bite, side-eyeing Phil. “Are you talking to Techno or me?”

“Both of you,” Phil says, he looks between Techno and Tommy and then at Daniel, “She would've adored you lot.”

The three of them exchange glances.

Techno shovels another dumpling into his mouth, “You never talked about your parents or your— upbringing.”

Phil nods slowly, “I didn’t.”

“Why you talkin’ about it now?” Techno’s eyes are narrowed.

“I’ve been thinking about it more,” Phil returns, he’s not sure why Techno is so fucking suspicious of him at the moment but... there’s not a real lot he can do about that. “Since— y’know.”

Techno does know.

“They would’ve loved you,” Phil says, “Ma enjoyed someone with a bit of...”

“Snark?”

“Sarcasm?”

“Sheer bitchiness?” Daniel adds at the end.

Both Techno and Tommy turn to look at him.

Daniel just smiles, half shrugging one of his shoulders.

“She would’ve,” Phil says again, “She probably would’ve been really fond of you,” he looks at Tommy who is mid-chewing his food. “You’d be the favourite, for sure.”

Tommy looks at him, before grinning, “I have that effect on—”

Daniel flings a napkin at him, and then another plastic spoon for good measure, “Shut the fuck up,” he turns to Phil slowly, opening and closing his mouth. “What was she like— your mum?”

Phil sighs, “Kind. She was kind. She kinda looked like Tommy, same golden hair.”

“Plot twist,” Tommy deadpans, “I’m related to you, and you’re like my— Uncle, I dunno.”

Phil just snorts, “My parents didn’t have siblings. I don’t think we’re related Tommy, and if we are it’s very far apart.”

“Oi, I’m an Avian hybrid *and* blond, it’s possible.”

“You are not the only blond Avian hybrid in L’Manberg,” Phil deadpans, “Does that mean Daniel’s related to every blond-haired— do you know what your closest hybrid type is?”

“Nope,” Daniel says, “Sure as fuck not human enough though, don’t have any cool powers.”

“You might,” Techno says, a knowing look in his eye, “I saw you jumping down those stairwells, that was some Fundy-level shit.”

“What does that even mean? I’m way better at parkour than Fundy.”

“That’s just not remotely correct,” comes Techno’s quick reply, and Daniel pulls a face at him.

Tommy has gone rather quiet, he’s sitting there, eating a lot slower than the others. His eyes flutter shut every now and again before he jerks awake and sits even more upright. That repeats a few times before Phil looks away.

“We should watch a movie,” Phil eventually says, and everyone gives him a confused look. “Why not? I don’t think we’ll be able to sleep easily.”

“Good point,” Techno says, “We should watch— that documentary on Phil—”

“Barbie Princess Charm School,” Daniel says with a serious nod.

Everyone turns to look at him, even Tommy sluggishly turns towards him.

Daniel just shrugs, “It’s a good movie, Delancy has a solid arc for a kids' movie.”

“When have you even watched that?” Techno says.

Daniel declines to answer the question and instead looks at Phil expectantly, Phil reaches to the side of him and grabs the remote. He looks at Daniel one more time as if saying ‘*do you really want to do this?*’ He doesn’t get any sort of response.

So Phil turns on Barbie Princess Charm School.

It’s a decent enough movie, Phil doesn’t expect Techno to be this invested in it, making Daniel stop talking whenever he tries to point out a plothole. If Tommy is conscious, then he’s not paying much attention to the movie.

That means Techno and Daniel bicker through the movie.

Then there's a weight on his shoulder, and Phil looks down.

It's a Tommy-shaped weight, conked out on his shoulder.

He looks up at Techno, and Techno is just grinning, his hand covering his mouth, but Phil can still see the grin in his eyes. Daniel also looks incredibly amused about the entire thing, he's not smiling as wide, but he's still smiling.

"You have a toddler on your shoulder," Techno deadpans.

"He is not a toddler," Daniel says, "That's just offensive to toddlers, Tommy has more tantrums than a toddler."

"When did you warm up to Tommy?" Techno asks, "If I recall correctly, you were avoiding him."

"No," Phil lies, "Tommy's— good, I like him."

Techno raises an eyebrow, "Yeah, but weren't you all like. *'I like him but I won't parent him, I'm done parenting traumatised children.'* And now it feels like you're attempting to parent Daniel and Tommy."

Daniel raises an eyebrow, "Please don't try to parent me."

"I'm not trying to parent either of you," Phil groans, "I am trying to look out for you— that is not the same thing. The same way that Techno isn't trying to parent you."

“Oh, he’s totally trying to parent us,” Daniel says, “It’s like an active thing that he’s doing.”

Phil just laughs, leaning back against the couch and looking at Techno, Techno who is covering his face with his hands, shaking his head as Daniel speaks.

“I’m not!”

“You are!” Daniel replies, “You totally would help us with homework if either of us were normal enough to have homework, sign the adoption papers buckaroo.”

“Shut up,” Techno shoves Daniel’s shoulder and Daniel sprawls onto the floor. “Watch the fucking movie, Greyson.”

“Alright, then Blade,” Daniel returns with a shit-eating grin.

And so they watch the movie. Techno still oddly invested in Delancy’s arc and Daniel trying to point out every plothole in the movie, to be fair there isn’t exactly a small amount of those, but it is also *a kids’ movie*.

But Daniel gets joy out of it, (mostly annoying Techno it seems) so Phil doesn’t try stop him.

Eventually, the movie ends, with Daniel throwing his hands up in the air, “Who was the royal before though? Did Claire just kick a monarch off the throne, were they just *waiting* for Delancy to be corinated? Wouldn’t Dame Devin be the regent— that’s what she wants. Delancy would technically be crowned, also what sort of system is it where you can put on a crown and suddenly be the royal— it doesn’t make any sense.”

“It’s a movie.”

“Also, the montage scene!” Daniel looks at them all, “No time passed at all— they don’t apparently have *seasons* it doesn’t make sense, also how come they only see the prince

school like— twice, there's just so much to unpack there. What about trans royals, what do they do? How does one become a lady royal, what do lady royals even *do* ?”

Techno just sighs, “Does it really matter?”

“It matters to me!”

Phil turns his head slightly so he's looking at Tommy, he's still sleeping on Phil's shoulder, breathing in and out slowly. He seems rather at peace, all things considered.

He shakes Tommy's shoulder, very lightly, he doesn't want to scare Tommy, and he knows that Tommy is jumpy.

Tommy's eyes open slowly, he doesn't move off of Phil's shoulder, instead he makes a noise in the back of his throat that almost sounds like a chirp. Phil has to fight the urge to start chirping back, he closes his mouth and breathes in heavily through his nose.

“Huh?” Tommy asks, “Wha'?”

“We finished the movie.”

“Did the good guys win?” Tommy asks, closing his eyes again.

“Yup.”

Tommy nods to himself, seemingly content with that and sighs deeply.

“Kid,” Phil says, “You gotta go to bed.”

Tommy grumbles at him.

“This isn’t negotiable.”

Tommy grumbles again like it’s negotiable, he leans the other way this time, and thumps onto the floor where he closes his eyes.

Techno, ever the drama king, picks Tommy up.

Tommy yelps, eyes immediately shooting open and an arm wrapping around Techno’s neck as he tries to keep himself steady. Techno then moves Tommy around so he’s being fireman-carried, and Tommy just flops and lets it happen.

Daniel snorts.

“Night, Phil,” Techno says, “I will go deliver the toddler off to bed.”

“Not a toddler,” Tommy replies, he still sounds clearly tired, but far less. “I am a grown-ass adult.”

“Everyone here knows you are not.”

Phil gets to listen to the noise of Techno, Daniel and Tommy being loud and themselves as they clamber up the stairs. Techno obviously threatening to throw Tommy down the stairs and Tommy wailing like he’s been murdered.

For a few moments Phil just sits there, on the floor surrounded by all the old Chinese takeout boxes and stuff. He doesn’t do anything for a long few moments before sighing deeply and starting to pack them up.

It's not hard, he only has to throw them into the bin.

Still, he sits there for a few moments.

Wilbur.

He misses him.

And Phil knows that's dumb because Wilbur isn't *gone*, Wilbur's not gone... he's still alive and breathing but...

It still feels like he is, and Phil doesn't know what he's going to do if he isn't. There's been vague talks of taking Wilbur off life support, especially if this goes on for a month or two, it's not been long enough for anyone to bring it up seriously.

But still, it's something in the back of Phil's head.

He sits there for a few moments, just breathing.

Things will be okay. Things have to be okay, right? Phil's dealt with a lot of shitty things in his life, but shitty things haven't happened to him or his family in— a decade. Well, that's a lie, but he's been able to handle it all, or his kids have.

This is out of Phil's ability to control or handle.

He takes a final deep breath.

Then he gets up off the floor.

Getting up off the floor, he goes upstairs. It's quieter now, so Phil assumes that whatever play fighting has gone on is over.

He knocks on Techno's door, and gets a grunt in return.

"Night, Techno."

"Night."

He walks to the next room over, the spare room, which has the door swung wide open. Daniel and Tommy are both on the two twin beds, Daniel is laying like a board, talking dramatically with his hands.

Somehow, they've managed to get their hands on snacks, and Tommy has a whole bag of chips in his lap.

"Night," Phil says, he leans at the doorway for a few more moments. Daniel and Tommy both face him. "Don't stay up too late."

Daniel just snorts.

Tommy snickers.

And Phil sighs, rolling his eyes and going to his own bedroom.

He falls asleep quickly, something about the exhaustion over several days finally catching up to him. He falls asleep on his stomach with his wings flopped over his body, it's the most

comfortable way to sleep with wings on your back.

He doesn't remember his dream, doesn't remember much apart from—

Waking up in the middle of the night.

It's a habit he hasn't broken from when Wilbur and Techno lived with him, he's hypersensitive to noise in the middle of the night.

So when he hears crashing in the downstairs bathroom, he sits up.

His brain is already going through the potential threats.

Break in? Phil can handle that. Someone actively trying to kill him? Phil can probably handle that, although that might cause slightly more issues along the way. A cat in his house? That would be amazing.

He slams his hand on the alarm clock on the side, 3:42, alright— either one of the people staying in his house are being odd, or having a meltdown. Or there is real potential for him to get stabbed right now.

Still, Phil is rolling out of bed, folding his wings behind him as he runs down the stairs.

The bathroom door is open, the sickly yellow light is seeping through the doorframe, and Phil can see the silhouette of Techno.

And yes, Wilbur is in hospital and Phil's still concerned about that.

But right now the more important thing is Techno, holding onto the toilet and hacking and attempting to throw up. Phil doesn't think Techno has anything to throw up, so it's just bile and stomach acid.

Techno used to do this when he was younger— and stressed. He'd throw up like nobodies business. Especially when he was stressed, Techno was good at hiding his emotions at the time, but there came a point where even he couldn't hide his emotions from himself.

"I'm fine."

"Fucking hell, Tech, just tell me when things get this bad."

"I'm fine!"

And then Techno had thrown up again, clearly showing he was not fine.

So now he was hunched over a toilet bowl, unable to throw anything up.

Phil rushes into the bathroom, kicking a towel aside and walks forwards. He hovers by Techno for a few moments, brain rushing to think of anything to say. Really, anything. What can he say to make this better?

Can he say anything to make this better?

Techno glances up at Phil, hair stuck to his face and breathing heavily. In and out. In and out as he just tries to breathe.

"You should've told someone it got this bad again."

“Just— stressed,” Techno manages, “Just— so fuckin’ stressed. I’m fine, did you sleep last night?”

“Tech,” Phil sits down on the floor next to him, “You don’t need to parent me, I’m doing okay. Right now I’m really, really worried about you.”

“Wilbur’s the one hurt.”

“You’re hurting too,” Phil says, he reaches out to Techno, who doesn’t flinch away from him. Phil works on gathering all of Techno’s hair into a ponytail so it’s not in front of his face. Techno doesn’t say anything, just breathes heavily. “I’m sorry for not checkin’ in on you—I’ve been so worried about Wilbur.”

“I get it,” Techno whispers, “I— I get it.”

Another long moment of silence.

“He might die, Phil,” Techno whispers, “Actually die. For so long— death has been a part of our fucking jobs, fuck, you were a hero when fifty percent of them would die in the first two years. I thought I’d accepted it— that you or Wilbur could easily die any day and now—”

He stops.

Phil doesn’t say anything.

He can’t say anything.

“Now he’s *dying*,” Techno whispers, “He’s dying, Dad.”

Phil shakes his head, “He’s not— he’s not, he’s going to be okay, Techno.”

“He’s dying and no one can do anything about it!” Techno yells, slamming his hands against the floor and the tiles crack underneath his hands slightly. “They want to take him off life support. They want to— he’s dying. No one ever fucking kept Wilbur safe and now he’s going to die because of it. You didn’t keep him safe, I sure as fuck never kept him safe and now he’s dying.”

“Tech—”

Techno just stares at him.

There’s an eerie calmness on his face, the same sort of haunted numbness Phil recognises from when Techno was younger. When missions would be tough and Techno would have to heal horrific injuries.

Oh.

Oh, okay.

Phil gets fully on the floor next to Techno now, he grabs Techno’s wrist. “This isn’t your fault.”

“I can’t heal him.”

“Neither can the healers,” Phil says gently, “This isn’t your fault, Techno. This can’t be your fault. Okay? Please listen to me.”

“I’m listening. I’m listening, Phil.”

“This isn’t your fault, this isn’t your fault— Techno, repeat it. This isn’t your fault. This isn’t — this isn’t your fault.”

Techno just stares at him with wide eyes, his breathing is deeper than usual, he’s not hyperventilating yet. He’s just breathing quickly, in and out and in and out again. Phil can handle this, he knows Techno when he’s like that.

“Repeat it,” Phil insists, “This isn’t your fault.”

“It’s not my fault.”

“Again.”

“It’s not my fault.”

“One more time.”

“It’s not my fault,” Techno says quickly, “I couldn’t have done anything— these things happen, they suck and are shitty and it’s not fair, but it happens. It’s not your fault either, Phil.”

“I know,” Phil says, and he does.

He knows this isn’t his fault, and he agrees with Techno. That this is just... one of those things, one of those things that no one *really* has control over. Not anyone here, it’s one of those things that hurt a lot. One of those things that are shit and undeserved but they happen anyway.

Techno drops the weight, and he is leaning against the toilet bowl again. Using his arm as a pillow as he leans his head against his arm.

They're both quiet for a long moment.

Just breathing in and out quietly.

It stretches.

Techno just breathing, Phil trying to do the same as they both stare at various point. Phil decides a crack in one of the wall tiles, and Techno decides one on the ground. They both focus on that, both grounding themselves.

In and out.

In and out.

They're both okay.

"You never told us about your mum and dad," Techno eventually says, he turns his head slightly so Phil can meet his eyes. "Never— Wilbur asked about them one time and he says he got yelled at."

Phil nods, screwing his eyes shut. "It was twenty years since they were dead— it was the anniversary, I guess that would be the word? Normally it just passes fine, but... I wasn't doing well with it."

"How long ago was this?"

"Six years."

Techno winces slightly.

They both sit there for a few more long moments, both breathing and trying to calm down from— whatever their life had now become. A flurry of hospitals and Wilbur and people talking about taking him off life support and—

So much.

So, so much.

“You would’ve been ten? If they died— twenty-six years ago.”

“Yup,” Phil says quietly, he turns more so he’s looking at Techno better, this feels like an eye-contact sort of conversation. “It was a villain attack. Just— died. Pa died protecting my neighbour’s child. Ma died— I don’t know how, they never told me.”

Techno just looks at him for a long moment, “Why didn’t you tell us?”

“It was never important.”

“It was your life, of course it was important,” Techno bites back.

Phil sighs, closing his eyes and trying to stop himself from getting too worked up over this, that was something none of them needed. Not now, probably ever, if Phil was being honest with himself.

Silence.

“What were they like?” Techno breaks the silence, “Were they like you?”

Phil nods, “I’d like to think so. They both worked so hard their entire life, Pa was kind and gentle in a way that I will not forget. Ma was witty and one of the brightest people I’ve ever met. They’d dance and sing and— they were good parents.”

“I’m glad,” Techno says, and Phil knows he means it, because Techno doesn’t speak without meaning it, or a heavy level of sarcasm, and there isn’t any sarcasm found in his voice.

They’re both quiet again.

Conversations feel harder than they used to.

Phil doesn’t know if that means Techno is growing up or they’re drifting apart. He’s more fine with the Techno maturing, he hates the idea that they might drift so far apart one day that nothing will be able to be done. This won’t be able to be fixed.

Instead, Techno sighs.

He turns around so his back is pressed against the wall, his head tilted up towards the ceiling.

“You’re a good parent,” Techno decides on, “I dunno if you think you are or not. But you are, you always were to Wil and I. Yeah, you fucked up a lot, but— I think I’m starting to get it, what it’s like.”

“You’re a father, huh?” Phil laughs and Techno just side-eyes him in a way that is very impressive and a very Phil move.

“For someone who didn’t have— much of a guide you were great, always listening to us and indulging our bullshit. You’re still one of the best listeners I’ve ever met, and you just love us so much, always.”

Phil laughs, he nods.

He does.

He loves them so much, always.

“And,” Techno sighs once again, “I dunno. You were just good for us— you were good for me, I wouldn’t have... become the person I’ve become without you. You taught me how to be kind. My entire life up until you, I spent I try’na fight people, hurt ‘em, be the one hurt second. Throwin’ the first punch.”

Phil smiles.

He remembers Techno when he was a kid. Snarky and sarcastic, mad at the world and everyone, would not give up, would not give in. Always would be the first one to punch because he didn’t want to be the first one hit.

“I love you,” Techno says.

Phil thinks this is the first time Techno has said it like this, so outright. He thinks this is the first time where it hasn’t been a goodbye on the phone, a slipped habit. Phil knows, of course, that Techno loves him, the same way Techno loves Wilbur and Tommy and Daniel, it’s as clear as day, no one needs to say anything.

Still, he said it.

“I love you too,” Phil responds easily, because it’s the truth and it has been for— well over a decade. “Thanks for being my kid.”

“Thanks for being my dad,” Techno returns. “My parents are kinda shit.”

“I know.”

Because he does.

And there’s always been something easy with Techno, that they both understand the other better than either of them would care to admit. Techno understands that Phil cares for him and Phil understands that Techno knows this. There’s not much more to be spoken between them about this because all the unspoken stuff is thousands of times louder.

He knows.

Eventually, they shuffle out of the bathroom and Techno gives him a wave before going back to his room. He indeed goes back to his room and the house falls quiet again. Phil is pretty sure he can hear Daniel and Tommy giggling about something upstairs.

And while Phil wants to go and tell them to go to sleep, he also is pretty sure those two haven’t had enough normal childhood experiences, and gossiping with your friends until insane times in the morning is very normal.

So he trudges up to bed, confirming that Tommy and Daniel are talking in low tones.

“I personally believe that it should be more socially acceptable to eat onions raw.”

“What the *fuck* is wrong with you?”

“Like an apple!” Comes Daniel’s frantic defence.

Phil snorts and makes his way to bed.

He once again, doesn't have a dream he can remember, and nothing else wakes him up in the middle of the night. He can't hear any clattering or people stumbling through the house, so he sleeps quite well.

Sleeping well is very rare for Phil, especially right now, but he manages a good night of sleep.

When he stumbles out of bed in the morning, he can smell burning.

He rubs the sleep from his eyes as he stumbles down the stairs.

He can also hear Tommy yelling frantically and Daniel laughing so hard that he can barely breathe. It's a little bit funny. Phil pokes his head into the kitchen.

There is a stack of lightly burned pancakes on a plate.

They're pretty good, all things considered.

Phil saunters over, taking one off the stack and eating it.

"Oi!" Tommy snaps, "Oh, you're not Techno. Go for it."

"Let me have more pancakes!" Comes Techno's voice from the lounge room. He's sitting on the couch in a way that can not be good for his posture, scrolling on his phone. "I will play the trauma card."

"I will play the trauma card back," Tommy snaps.

The energy in the air is calm and easy as they all move around each other, people dart around grabbing various foods and continuously eating the now-lessening stack of pancakes off the plate. It feels easy.

That's how simple it is.

It just feels easy, they all get ready and dressed for the day. Showering and brushing their teeth and Phil doesn't know when the last time Daniel and Tommy went home is, he's not sure if he should be concerned or not.

Phil stretches out his wings in the lounge room, some stray feathers hit the ground. Daniel is watching him with confused eyes. Techno is in the bathroom and Tommy is packing up his stuff upstairs.

"Big wing span," Daniel says, he tilts his head slightly, "How do you fold those up so it's all like— not like that?"

"Like this?" Phil asks, and he folds his wings up so they're flat against his back. He could put a jacket over the top if he wanted to, but today he doesn't really want to. "Practice mostly, I didn't want doors to be difficult to go through."

"Does it hurt?"

"Nah, the muscles are used to it."

Daniel tilts his head, "Huh— so it's just conditioning then?"

"Yeah, basically," Phil shakes his wings out a little bit more, it's not quite as good as preening, but Phil doesn't have the time, nor energy to ask Techno to preen his wings. "Uh— Daniel, I have a question?"

Daniel just looks up at him.

Phil isn't great at analysing looks, but this feels similar to fear. The way that Daniel's eyes go slightly wide and he's looking at Phil for threats, scanning for any weapon that Phil might have on him. Phil both wants to punch whoever made Daniel feel like he has to do this, and be offended.

Which he knows isn't necessarily fair.

Daniel doesn't move at all, but he does meet Phil's eyes.

"Yeah?"

"Can you—" Phil takes a deep breath, "They have a place where they're putting all of the recovered items from the apartment. I'm hoping that they have a safe, Wilbur has a bunch of sentimental items in there."

"In a safe?"

"Yeah, we all do," Phil says easily, he knows his is under the bed in his room. He doesn't know where Techno keeps his, but knowing how Techno is with sentimental items it's either stored underneath the floor in his bathroom or it's still a Phil's house. "His has his name engraved on it— could you please try and find it? I don't think—"

'I don't think any of us can handle it without crying forever' is what Phil really wants to say, but he knows that he can't say that, that easily.

Daniel seems to get it because he gives a polite smile and nods his head. "Sure, send me the address and I'll go look around."

"Thank you so much," Phil means it. Daniel seems to know because he nods.

Daniel nods, before walking out of the room to do anything else.

After about twenty minutes of struggling, they all get ready to leave. Daniel's and Tommy's backpacks are both packed with all of their stuff, plus some snacks that Phil threw at them. *'Just in case!'*

Techno had laughed very hard at that.

The mood is solemn as they approach the hospital again.

Phil sighs as he parks the little ute he has. Another day of seeing Wilbur, with his life in the balance. He glances at the two teenagers in his car. Daniel is looking down at his feet, Tommy has his eyes pressed to the window where they know Wilbur's room is.

They'll be okay.

And Phil swings open his car door, preparing to go back into the hospital.

Purpled knows what it looks like when someone is falling apart.

And *holy shit* Phil, Techno and Tommy are breaking apart at the seams. It feels like they're all one step away from snapping. They're all testy and annoying to be around and snap if someone *breathes* too loud.

So Purpled breaks a little bit in return.

He's sitting in a chair, babysitting Wilbur and also Techno. Tommy and Phil are finally getting some rest, after Kristin snapped at both of them, saying Wilbur wouldn't want them to work themselves to nothing.

He'll either get better or he won't.

This leaves Purpled and Techno, and Wilbur but he barely counts.

Purpled refuses to look at Wilbur, he's so still—

Techno is sitting in the chair, arms crossed, head tilted up. He's trying to pretend that he's not bothered by all of this, that he's almost above it. Purpled can read people well enough to know that's *bullshit*. His eyes keep glancing to Wilbur, his leg is tapping at an incredible speed and there is the look of heavy loss on his face.

He looks ruined.

Purpled pulls out his phone, absent-mindedly opening 'Fruit Ninja', he's getting pretty good at the game and—

"Stop that," Techno snaps, for what feels like the hundredth time today.

He's snapped at Purpled for coughing, at him for moving on his chair, at him for opening his phone twice now and at him for staring straight up at the ceiling trying to think of anything else.

And...

Purpled is kinda sick of being used as the verbal punching bag, Techno isn't doing this shit to Tommy and Phil and Purpled knows better than to let himself be treated differently for no reason.

“What the fuck do you want from me?” Purpled eventually snaps, something in his chest breaks a little and he feels it snap inside of him. “Nothing I do will be good enough for you right now, do you need to punch me? Do you need to punch something? I am happy to be the target for either, stop being a dick and tell me what you actually need right now Techno.”

Techno just looks at him, blankness in his eyes.

“You’re not one to pull this bullshit on— anyone, let alone fucking me. You’re not pulling this shit on Tommy, so you’re sure as fuck not able to pull it on me. So tell me, what do you need me to do right now? How do I get you to stop yelling at everyone? Because that’s going to break Tommy if it’s directed at him and Wilbur doesn’t need your familial relationships to be broken when he wakes up.”

“If,” Techno mutters darkly.

“Wha’?”

“If, Wilbur wakes up.”

Purpled scowls a little bit deeper. “What do you *need* Techno?”

And Purpled knows this game very well, he knows how to push buttons, he’s good at it—he’s trained at it. He knows the way through to Techno isn’t offering to talk about emotions, Techno is about as emotionally stunted as he is. Techno isn’t Tommy and that’s clear as day. He knows the way through to Techno, especially right now are jabs and insults and sharp tones.

Normally, Techno is too nice, too put together to respond in the way Purpled wants. Right now? Techno is at his limits, and Purpled knows it—he thinks Techno knows it too. He trusts that Techno won’t hurt him, and he’s not scared of pushing his buttons.

It's just... slightly intimidating to wind up someone who could kill you, probably quite easily.

And he knows Techno needs *some sort of fucking outlet* and if that's being yelled at then—
Purpled can handle it.

“What do I need?” Techno scoffs, he doesn't stand up, he doesn't need to for Purpled to be slightly terrified. “I need my brother to be awake— I need Elysium gone. I need everyone I love to be safe, and I need everything to go back to normal. I need you to stop pretending you know anything about what's going on and—”

“Shut the fuck up,” is the first thing Purpled says before he can even think to stop himself.

Techno stares at him, eyebrow raised.

“You don't get those things right now, none of us do. Going back to normal? That means no Tommy, nothing was normal after he arrived and we both fucking know it well. What can I do, right now, what can you do, right now?”

Techno's scowl deepens.

Purpled personally didn't think the scowl *could* deepen much more beyond what it already has. But Techno has proven that wrong.

“Stop them from falling apart.”

“Well, you're all fucking falling,” Purpled hisses, “If that's your job you're failing at it *Blade*. Your power is strength, right? How are you failing at being strong right now? You're repressing, you're snapping at people, you're—”

Purpled is gonna get way too vulnerable right now.

“Yelling at me and I really fucking hate that,” Purpled snarls, “I hate being yelled at, I get all panicky and I can’t fucking think. So I need you to stop yelling at me for— being here. My crime is *being here*, Techno.”

Techno’s expression doesn’t falter.

It’s just... deep, deep contempt.

Purpled tries to not let himself be scared of Techno. But he knows deep down there’s something that will almost always be scared of Techno, even if he doesn’t show it on his face. Techno is intuitive and strong and could probably kill Purpled very easily.

It’s a healthy fear, he thinks.

“Look— you don’t have to fucking like me.”

Purpled very much would like Techno to like him.

He won’t say that.

“But you can’t— treat me like shit because I’m one of the only ones here right now. You can’t— treat me, or anyone else like that. Wilbur—”

“You don’t know Wilbur,” Techno snaps, “Don’t talk about him—”

“Yes, I fucking know him!” Purpled yells. His temper has snapped and he doesn’t even care anymore. “I know cookies and cream is his favourite ice cream and he doesn’t like dumplings but pretends to because it’s a family tradition.”

The expression on Techno's face shifts into something else.

Purpled can't bring himself to care, it feels like ice is flooding his veins and now he's just talking, he's wrapped in terror and rage and the fact no one fucking *sees* him the way he's been trained to see everyone else.

"I know that he hates anteaters and can't bring himself to hate Theseus. I know that he feels betrayed by you and will for a very long time, I know Wilbur, the same way I know you and Tommy and Quackity. I know all of you, I made myself know all of you. Just because none of you know shit about me doesn't mean I don't fucking know you!"

Techno's eyes widen a fraction.

Purpled doesn't shut up.

He knows he should, he knows he should shut the fuck up and apologise for this outburst but he can't.

"What do you actually know about me, Techno?" Purpled yells, "My name? No one knows anything about me, not even my best friend. I'm trained to be in the shadows— that's *fine* no one knows me!"

Techno watches him.

Purpled collapses down onto the chair, covering his face with his hand. He won't cry, he won't cry, he's made it so that he can't be known— he never opens up about anything. He doesn't *let* anyone know him.

This is what he wants.

So why is there pressure behind his eyes as he fights away tears?

He wants this, he wants this— he doesn't want to be understood, he doesn't need to be understood—

Techno looks at him, tilting his head a little bit. "If you want to be cared for, that's not anything to be ashamed of."

"I don't need to be fucking taken care of!" Purpled yells, although his heart isn't quite in it, "I can take care of myself— and I sure as fuck don't need you taking care of me."

Techno considers him for a long moment in silence. There's the steady beat of the heart rate monitor and the whirl of machinery that is keeping Wilbur alive. Apart from that it's quiet, and Purpled feels like he's being looked at.

"What's going on?" Techno asks softly, "What's wrong, Purpled?"

The use of 'Purpled' gets him, he flinches slightly away from it. He's not quite used to people apart from Tommy using his name. He's gotten so used to Daniel, that even the slip hurts his chest.

Purpled shakes his head.

Techno sighs, "Purpled— what's bothering you, really?"

He shakes his head, "I shouldn't have said anything—"

"You want someone to push," Techno says and hits the nail on the head because *of course* he does. "You want someone to not believe you when you say everything is fine, ask one more time, push a little bit more. You're known and cared for Purpled, people just believe you too much when you say you're fine."

“I’m fine,” Purpled rasps out.

He wants to be left alone, he wants Techno to keep trying to get an answer out of him. He wants to open up about everything on his mind but he also wants to run away and never talk to Techno ever again. He wants to apologise for yelling at Techno, he wants to keep screaming at him until his voice is hoarse.

“What’s bothering you, kid?”

Kid.

Fucking— kid, Purpled hasn’t been a kid in so long that it’s not even funny. He’s never gotten to be a kid. He never got a childhood— he’s not a kid, he’s never been a kid. But Techno says it with such genuine emotion in his voice.

Purpled refuses to cry.

He’s not Tommy, he won’t cry at the slightest show of basic empathy and compassion.

He just nods at Techno.

“I’m not a kid,” Purpled manages, instead of anything else. It feels like there’s something stuck in his throat that he can’t breathe or talk around. It’s just... painful, talking and trying to keep his voice even is painful.

It hurts deep in his chest, in a part that he thought he’d locked away forever. The childish— not childish, the want to just be... cared for and not have to deal with everything alone. He has Tommy but Tommy always has his own shit going on and—

“You look like one to me,” Techno returns, “Please... what’s going on Purpled?”

Purpled manages to meet Techno’s eyes, “I think— I—” he cuts himself off, laughing slightly. “I— my brother. I— I don’t know if he is that anymore, but uh— he was my brother. Punz. Punz— he—”

Techno doesn’t say anything, just watches him.

“I think...” Purpled puts his face in his hands, “I don’t know what I think. He hurt me.”

Techno’s expression goes from one of curiosity to completely cold in a moment like a switch has flipped. “What?” His tone is dangerous and Purpled flinches away from it.

“He— he—” Purpled shakes his head, “I can’t.”

“You can,” Techno shuffles his chair closer to Purpled’s, “Purpled— you don’t have to tell me anything, okay? You never have to tell me anything, okay? Listen to me— focus on your breathing. You don’t have to tell me, but I’m here if you need to. I won’t tell anyone, I won’t use it against you— no one will find out.”

“You’ll hate me.”

“Unless you dropped the building on Wilbur, I doubt it—”

There it is.

Purpled hesitates, “I told them where he lives.”

Techno sits up. “What?”

“He— I— I went to get some tech off them since Tubbo and Tommy fell out and we didn’t fucking have anything— and I y’know, got it. Offered to pay, of course, I did, I have enough money several times over and—”

Techno looks murderous.

Purpled can’t bring himself to care, because caring hurts too much. “And— and— instead he fucking grabbed me, and— it hurt and I know I can handle pain but it hurt and I couldn’t think and— I said where Wilbur lived. I told them where Wilbur lived and I’m sorry—”

He’s hyperventilating.

That... isn’t supposed to be happening.

Techno is staring at him with horror in his eyes, and Purpled doesn’t know if that’s directed at him, or the general situation but both terrify him. And Purpled really doesn’t want to have Techno kill him in a hospital room.

If people in comas can hear then Wilbur would have to hear Purpled being murdered and that didn’t seem beneficial to anyone. He is quite fond of Wilbur, and he thinks that Techno murdering him would put a dampener on Wilbur’s and Techno’s relationship.

“Purpled— Purpled,” Techno says, “Stop it—”

So he does.

Like that, he manages to stop it.

Stopping his breathing entirely and looking at Techno, forced calmness on his face. His chest aches as he holds his breath, but he manages to stop hyperventilating and stare at Techno.

“No, no— fuck,” Techno says, “That wasn’t a command, you’re fine. Fuck, someone trained you too well. Start hyperventilating, that’s less terrifying than this, Purpled, stop looking calm it’s fucking scary.”

Purpled doesn’t do such a thing.

He just stares at Techno, his chest burns but he’s okay. He’s okay, he’s okay— he’s fine, he’s okay. Really. His breathing is fine, if not a bit shallow and he stares at Techno, breathing in and out. His breathing is forced to be even.

It’s even though.

“Good?” Purpled asks.

“Fucking— Prime,” Techno mutters, “Purpled that’s—”

“I’m fine, I’m— I’m okay. I’m okay.”

“You’re—”

“I’m fine,” Purpled snaps and Techno just stares at him. His expression is something between heartbroken and angry, and Purpled doesn’t know which emotions are being directed at him and which aren’t.

It feels like all of them.

Techno shakes his head, “You shouldn’t just— be able to *do* that.”

“But I can.”

“But you can...” Techno whispers, if Purpled didn’t know better, he’d say Techno was about to cry.

“If you’re gonna whack me,” Purpled says, “Please don’t tear up the stitches.”

“Wha’?”

“In my stomach...” Purpled says slowly, “Please don’t tear the stitches.”

“I’m not going to hit you.”

“You probably should.”

“That is— incredibly harmful and I don’t even have time to break down everything wrong with that statement,” Techno sighs, he meets Purpled’s eyes. “I just have some questions.”

“Go for it,” Purpled mutters, tilting back and staring up at the ceiling, it’s the same plain ceiling he’s used to. Clean white, with not a stain on it, everything looks nice and perfect. Purpled looks for any imperfections— he can’t find any.

Being asked questions is a lot better than being whacked, something that Purpled fully thought was going to happen. If someone did something like this to Tommy, Purpled would beat that fucker up.

Techno sighs, “How did you know where Wilbur lived?”

“I know where you all live,” Purpled murmurs, “I’ve seen your files, I was— looking for something else.”

“You’ve seen our files?” Techno asks, there’s a clear threat in his tone.

Purpled wants to kick himself for letting his guard down so quickly. Techno isn’t on his side, he never has been. He’s on Wilbur’s and Phil’s and Tommy’s side far beyond his own, and what he’s done actively hurts Wilbur.

This makes sense, and Purpled has to pray that Techno doesn’t arrest him right on the spot.

“Yeah—” Purpled looks down at his feet, no emotion seeps into his tone but he has to fight to keep it out. “Yeah... I just— memorised them, I don’t know how Punz knew that I knew.”

“Why did you memorise them?”

“If one of you hurt Tommy,” Purpled says, “I— wanted to know.”

Techno looks at him, “I’m both proud of your loyalty and concerned.”

Purpled just shrugs, before looking back down at his feet, “I’m sorry.”

“Kid—” Techno whispers.

Purpled hasn’t been a kid in a long time, but there’s always something about how Techno says it, like that he believes that Purpled is a kid. That he believes he’s not some traumatised, broken, mess. That he’s just a kid.

Tears well in his eyes, and Purpled refuses to let them fall.

Purpled wipes his eyes and the unshed tears.

Techno doesn't move to hug him or anything of the type, and Purpled is both incredibly grateful for that, and incredibly hurt. Purpled wipes his eyes again.

"I'm— gonna go," Techno says, and Purpled thinks he's about to cry. "Gotta— get food, or something."

He almost trips over his own feet and walks out of the room.

Purpled is left to stare at Wilbur, in the silent room.

He doesn't *want* to, but he does anyway. Wilbur looks exactly the way someone does when they're knocked on their ass badly. Cuts and bruises and those are just what Purpled can see.

"Please live," Purpled says, "Just because— you're kinda alright."

That's about all the emotional vulnerability Purpled will allow himself right now.

He sighs, crossing his arms.

"Don't fucking die," Purpled says again, "People— people need you, I want you to stay around. Who else is gonna— talk to me about— whatever the fuck rich people talk about. So don't fucking die Wilbur Soot."

That doesn't seem... drastic enough.

If Wilbur *can* hear him, he needs Wilbur to know that Purpled will fucking end his entire bloodline if he dies. Purpled does *not* want to deal with the outfall of Wilbur dying, Tommy and Techno would be messes.

Purpled— might even miss this idiot.

“Or I’ll fucking kill you,” Purpled decides, yes, that’s drastic enough. “And uh— sorry, I guess. For telling Punz where you live. He probably would’ve figured it out eventually but— y’know, I’m still pretty sorry. So don’t die.”

Yeah.

Good message.

Purpled nods to himself.

Successful.

He has to leave, he doesn’t think he can handle staring at how still Wilbur is knowing that he had a part to play in it.

He has a job to do, get anything that might be Wilbur’s. He’s a lot of thing, but he’s always going to listen to something Phil says. Partly out of fear and partly out of respect. He fears Phil more than he respects him, but he respects him more than he thought he would.

Then he turns on his heel and storms out of the hospital.

He leaves the hospital without a word.

His feet find his way to Upper L'Manberg before he can really stop himself or think about it, he knows that his phone is buzzing and a look at it says Techno's trying to call him. He ignores it and keeps walking.

The buzzing gets annoying so Purpled gives up and decides to text him.

Daniel Greyson:

piss off. I'm fine

Techno "The Blade" No-Last-Name

Don't run off.

Daniel Greyson:

too late, i ran. cope

not kidnapped or anything

He feels his phone buzz again, and ignores it promptly.

Purpled keeps walking.

Eventually, he finds his way to the place that Phil described. It's just a small building which is apparently near where Wilbur's apartment— was. Purpled can almost still smell the smoke in the air as he moves through the area.

He finds the little building, pushing the door open.

The room just has tables filled with *stuff* on it, blankets that survived, TVs even, bits and pieces of jewellery and stuffed animals and the remains of lives are here. Six people are reported dead and this might be their stuff.

That makes Purpled feel sick.

He rifles through stuff, no one looks at him confused, in fact he gets a couple of sad, almost pitying looks as he goes through stuff. There are clothes and bits of bricks and stuffed animals, and a potted plant that looks like it's struggling. (Purpled gets one of the attendants to water the pot plant, just in case the owner of the plant wants it back— what sort of person would Purpled be if he let it die?)

Purpled, against all odds, manages to find something that he thinks belongs to Wilbur.

After an hour, maybe two, of finding random shit that might belong to dead people, looking he finds it.

A little box. It's metal or something sturdy.

Wilbur Soot is carved on the front of it in a neat scrawl that Purpled only knows how to read because he learnt cursive as a child. On the side of it is a half-charred, peeling sticker of a guitar and the union jack.

Wilbur isn't even British.

It makes Purpled huff, he picks up the box, turning it over in his hands.

Purpled knows it's heatproof just by picking it up, something like a safe. There's a lock on the front of it, and Purpled doesn't have the key. Wilbur probably doesn't either, but his power is intangibility.

He'll manage.

The box is a small thing, with what clearly sounds like papers in it when Purpled shakes it. It's about as big as both of his hands put together, and Purpled has the feeling in the pit of his stomach that these are every sentimental item Wilbur owns.

The box was designed to make it through a fire.

And make it through a fire it did.

Wilbur is... twenty-five? And all the sentimental items he owns can fit in a box this big. Purpled doesn't know how to feel about it, he doesn't know why this is concerning him, Purpled doesn't have *any* sentimental items.

But he's not Wilbur.

Wilbur is Wilbur, and Purpled knows that Wilbur cares a lot about the people and things about him. He sees the way that Wilbur will move in front of someone without thinking, ready to defend them, he's seen Wilbur's blow-ups about Theseus not that long ago. He doesn't *know* Wilbur, but he knows him enough.

He knows that he's the only other person nearby Purpled can talk to about anything high society. Dances and how to do ties and the absurdity of cutlery usage while still knowing how to actually use it. He knows that Wilbur cares a lot for the same people that Purpled cares about, and he knows that Wilbur is incredibly mentally ill, to a point where even Purpled is impressed.

So all of that, and a tiny box to show for it?

Purpled doesn't like that.

He's not smart enough to piece together what any of it means, but he knows in the pit of his stomach that it's not good. Maybe Wilbur just sees more value in the people around him than the objects around him?

Purpled will tell himself that anyway.

He eventually stashes the box, holding it against his side, and heads back towards the hospital.

The walk is fine, nothing of note happens.

The staff know him by this point, and Purpled nods as he walks through.

The entire place smells like bleach and— sadness, most of the people injured in the various attacks have either been fixed or are awaiting a funeral. Wilbur and a few others appear to be the rare exceptions.

Purpled reaches Wilbur's room, holding the box to his chest.

He steps in through the doorway before pausing.

Techno is sitting in a chair next to Wilbur's bed, his head is tilted up towards the ceiling, and he's leaning towards Wilbur like Wilbur will lean back towards him. Shoulder-to-shoulder

“You have to live you *asshole* ,” Techno says, and Purpled stops mid-step.

Whatever this is, he isn't supposed to hear it.

“I’ll— kill you,” Techno decides on, his voice is thick with something and Purpled pauses a few more moments before stepping lightly into the room. “You can’t die on me, not like this — you wanted to go into politics remember?”

Purpled places the box down on a table a few steps inside the door.

“I think you were messin’ with me,” Techno says and the pain in his voice is too much for Purpled to deal with. Techno is a lot of things but he’s not supposed to sound like *this*, like he’s defeated and something broken even in the way he was sitting. “I don’t think you wanna be a politician, but at this point, I’d give anything for you to be awake— so if you have to be a politician then *go for it*.”

Purpled isn’t supposed to be hearing this.

But he can’t draw himself away.

“Please,” Techno eventually chokes out. “I don’t want to do this without you.”

Purpled eventually clears his throat, and Techno whirls around.

There are tear tracks on his face, but Techno immediately wipes his tears on his hand, and looks at Purpled, challenging him to say anything about it.

Purpled is willing to take him up on that challenge.

“You’re allowed to cry,” Purpled says slowly, he picks up the box and walks across the room. He then places the box down next to Wilbur’s bedside. “I’m not gonna think you’re weaker or anything.”

Techno wipes at his eyes more.

“It’s just... odd to see you cry,” Purpled pauses next to Wilbur’s bedside, he doesn’t move to sit on any of the seats and he then glances down at Techno who is staring at the foot of the bed like it wronged him.

Purpled crosses his arms, glancing between Wilbur and Techno. “They say that people in comas can hear you.”

Techno side eyes him.

It’s a terrifying side-eye.

Purpled needs to learn how to do that.

“I dunno if that’s true or not, but if it is, Wilbur will wake up,” Purpled says, he looks at Wilbur. There are still cuts and bruises on his face, and he looks like fucking shit, and Purpled isn’t going to sugarcoat it. But if Wilbur can hear them, then Purpled knows he’ll wake up. “He will.”

Purpled glances at Techno, then back at Wilbur.

“You said once, a long time ago that when Wilbur was young, he was like me.”

Techno just watches him wordlessly. He nods his head, although nod seems a bit strong of a word for what Techno does because he just sort of tilts his head.

Purpled gets the message anyway.

“Then, he’ll wake up. As simple as that. He loves you all too much to not.”

“You’re a good person,” Techno says slowly, like the words don’t fit in his mouth and somehow the unease they’re said with makes Purpled wince. “Yeah. You are. A bit fucked up, but good intentions— nicer intentions than the rest of us.”

“Us?” Purpled asks.

Techno glances at Wilbur, “SBI. You’re one of us, you have been for a long time.”

“Oh,” Purpled whispers. “Oh...”

“If you want it,” Techno finally looks at Purpled properly, turning to face him and Purpled meets his gaze easily. “You have a home, here with us.”

“I’m not very good at being part of a family.”

“Neither are we,” Techno says with a small laugh, gesturing at Wilbur in the hospital bed. “Most families are a little bit bad at being part of a family.”

“Maybe,” Purpled says, he sits down in a chair. “Maybe one day.”

Techno glances at him and then glances away.

He nods, “You’re already a part of it, you know that, right?”

“I know. Just— I don’t want to admit that, not yet.”

“Okay.”

They sit there in silence, both of them staring at Wilbur who didn't dare move.

Purpled doesn't know how to be a part of a family, he doesn't— he doesn't know if he wants to be. Families are scary, and they're loyal and... Purpled doesn't think he's any of these things. He can't remember his actual parents, who probably loved and cared for him. If he can't remember them, does he deserve the family given to him?

Then he glances at Techno, who is looking at Wilbur the most worried that Purpled has ever seen him. Then he looks at Wilbur and finds a similar expression on his own face, whether he likes it or not.

He's a part of this, it appears.

It doesn't scare him as much as it used to.

There's a stutter on the heart monitor.

Phil's eyes dart away from his phone and over to Wilbur.

And Wilbur's eyes open.

Phil holds his breath for a moment, just watching him.

Wilbur's eyes meet his.

It's one of the best things Phil's ever seen.

He looks a wreck, with cuts on his face and it feels like just about every machine in the hospital is connected to him, and his eyes are incredibly tired, slightly squinty as he looks at Phil.

“Wil?” Phil shuffles closer, “Kid?”

Wilbur just looks at him.

He’s awake.

Things will probably be okay.

And Phil bursts into tears, clapping a hand over his mouth as he looks at Wilbur.

Wilbur tilts his head, he manages a smile.

“You’re okay,” Phil rasps out, unable to think of anything else. “You’re okay, you’re okay—you’re okay.” It feels like he repeats it until his voice goes coarse and is much more than a whisper. Because Wilbur’s awake, he’s alive— he’s stable.

He’s okay. He’s okay.

Wilbur makes a small noise in the back of his throat.

Phil just nods, he doesn’t know what else he can do.

Wilbur tries to speak again, before shaking his head. He leans against his pillow, his eyes flutter shut but there’s a gentle smile on his face.

Wilbur just smiles, before closing his eyes and passing out again.

It's easily the longest time that he's had awake.

Phil stumbles out of the room when Wilbur goes unconscious again, letting a nurse handle this. He hits the button and just stares.

The nurse scrambles in and Phil starts talking, he barely remembers what he says because *Wilbur's alive, he's awake*. And much more beyond that leaves his brain, because Wilbur's alive and—

He knows he should do a lot of things. He knows he should call Techno and Tommy and Daniel. He knows he should call Quackity or Shubble or—

He sees Kristin turn the corner.

She's standing there, hands tucked into pockets, she tilts her head at Phil for a few moments. Phil just looks at her, fighting away the tears from his eyes, he thinks he fails. Kristin gives him a gentle look.

“Hey,” she says gently.

“Hi,” Phil returns, his voice thick with emotion.

“You okay?”

“Wilbur's— awake, not really awake but he's awake enough and— I think he's gonna be okay—”

Kristin just looks at him, her expression so, so, pitying, and Phil can't bring himself to tell her to stop looking at him like he's a kicked puppy. He feels a bit like a kicked puppy, so it works quite well.

She then opens her arms for a hug.

Phil manages to keep it together for about five seconds, before he starts crying, just from sheer relief. Kristin doesn't do anything but wrap her arms around him and hug him tightly, and Phil just cries.

It's over.

Wilbur's alive.

He cries a lot.

He doesn't know how long he cries, but Kristin holds him tightly.

"It's okay," Kristin says gently, "We're okay."

Phil sobs into her shoulder at that, Kristin just holds him until his sobs lessen and he's able to wipe his eyes.

As the days go on, Wilbur gets slightly better each day.

He still sleeps a lot. He sleeps most of the day, but the nurses and doctors assure anyone nearby that this is not a coma, that he is just sleeping to try make up for it.

It doesn't stop Phil's nerves, or the fact that he is almost always on the verge of crying forever. Kristin is the one to keep an eye on him, Phil tries to keep an eye on everyone else. It's weird having someone else look out for Phil, Phil doesn't mind it though.

Kristin is amazing, she brings food and sits with Wilbur when Phil physically can not handle it for much longer. She also keeps Phil in check when he goes to snap at people. They make a decent pair.

So the days pass.

For once Wilbur's hybrid genetics seem to help him slightly, they realise that he doesn't need the ventilator anymore, they are keeping his heart rate monitored due to his tendency for it to... stop working every now and again.

Everyone has been in and out, it's been a few days and Wilbur's consciousness is very patchy, sometimes he wakes up and just squints at people or laughs at someone and then goes back to sleep.

Wilbur hasn't been conscious enough to hold any conversations or anything, the extent of his abilities in that regard have been mumbled words, one time apparently he woke up when Tommy was there, pat him on the head, said "*Safe.*" Then passed out again.

Phil is sitting there by himself, Techno and Tommy are out getting food after a day of being stressed. Phil's on his phone, scrolling through Twitter on the secret account he's not supposed to have.

There's a noise, and Phil looks up.

Wilbur's eyes are open.

Phil is immediately shuffling his seat forwards, getting ready to call the nurse because things have gone wrong before.

Wilbur turns his head around the room, something almost frantic in his gaze. The heart monitor shows clear panic as he looks around. His eyes immediately dart down to both of his hands, looking for something there.

He doesn't find it, and his shoulders relax, he looks up and around the room, eyes eventually landing on Phil.

Wilbur relaxes even more. "Not kidnapped?"

"Not kidnapped," Phil repeats.

Wilbur groans, "Furniture."

"Pardon?" Phil says.

"My—" he pauses for a moment, blinking slightly, "House."

And Phil finds himself laughing.

Wilbur almost died, and he did for a bit, he was in a coma for a week and he might not ever be the same again, but he's worried about— his furniture, the furniture that got destroyed in his now destroyed apartment.

"I pay rent..." Wilbur mumbles, and Phil can barely make out the words through his laughter, "Don't have insurance on— on— nothin'."

Phil keeps laughing.

Wilbur glances at him through half-lidded eyes and smiles, a tired smile.

But he's awake and talking and—

“I would hug you,” Phil says, “But you have so many wires and tubes attached to you I don't know what I'd knock out.”

Wilbur nods to himself, “Did a number on myself aye?”

Phil nods, “Yeah, kid.”

“Not a kid.”

“You're my kid.”

Wilbur nods to himself, eyes fluttering shut. “Favourite kid.”

“Wil...”

“I'm in the hospital, I'm your favourite by default.”

Phil pauses, smiling a little bit and grabbing Wilbur's hand in his own, it doesn't matter how old Wilbur gets, how old Phil gets, he will never stop seeing the confused, scared ten-year-old that Phil was asked to collect from a police station.

“Yeah,” Phil sighs, “You can be my favourite... just for a bit.”

Wilbur gives him a sleepy smile, “I’m never— gonna— let Techno forget this, I’m the favourite child.”

Phil just laughs, scooting his chair forwards and he runs a hand through Wilbur’s hair, it’s gotten longer, and Wilbur probably needs a haircut soon, he tends to get weird when his hair gets too long.

Wilbur sighs, “Is Tommy okay?”

“Yeah.”

“Did I miss anything?”

“A lot,” Phil returns, he moves more of the hair out of Wilbur’s face. “You missed a lot.”

Wilbur hums, “Is everyone okay, in the apartment?”

“I— not now,” Phil says gently, “You’re just awake and conscious.”

“I love you,” Wilbur mumbles.

“Love you too.”

Wilbur sighs, tilting his head to the side and leaning his head slightly against the bars either side of him in the hospital bed. “Tommy’s okay?”

“Completely, he has some scratches but they’re healed by now.”

“How long was I out?”

“Two weeks.”

Wilbur nods his head, he closes his eyes.

“Tired,” Wilbur mumbles.

“Go to sleep.”

Wilbur indeed, goes to sleep and Phil watches his steady breathing, something that he has taken for granted for too long. Wilbur’s alive. He’s okay.

When Techno and Tommy come barrelling into the room they straight up wake up Wilbur, Wilbur panics for a moment, before seeing his brothers and he relaxes almost completely. He makes a noise and reaches for Tommy.

He grabs Tommy’s shoulder, looking at him for any injuries. “Good,” Wilbur says.

“Wil,” Tommy shakes off Wilbur’s grip, he just smiles for a moment, “I’m okay, you should be worried about yourself.”

“‘m fine.”

“You literally can not walk,” Techno sits down on the bed, he also scans Wilbur for injuries, but Phil knows he knows every injury Wilbur has. “You are not *fine* .”

“I’m fine,” Wilbur mumbles, “Twitter thinks I’m so fine.”

“Is he on pain medication?” Techno asks, looking at Phil.

Phil nods, he snorts into his hand as Techno cringes.

Then Techno turns back to his brother, he puts his hand on the side of Wilbur’s head, “I know you’re high as fuck on pain medication now, but I will never let you forget this.” He pats the side of Wilbur’s face.

Wilbur winces slightly.

“You are on enough pain medication you didn’t even feel that,” Phil says.

Wilbur gives a guilty grin.

This healing period of Wilbur’s lasts a nice two weeks.

Wilbur is left alone by everyone he wants to leave him alone, he starts practicing walking again, he slowly gets taken off the pain medication. He doesn’t take his medication that’s supposed to suppress his hybrid traits.

This means one time he tries to phase through the bed.

Which is a nightmare for everyone involved.

Then comes an argument about Wilbur starting his other medication again, Wilbur being very for it, and Phil— and the rest of the medical advice Wilbur has been given, goes against it because it can fuck with— just his everything.

He eats more solid food, practices walking and complains about his lack of antidepressants. Then he starts having the start of withdrawals because of it, and that's a mess on top of how he currently is.

That's a mess, but one the hospital is handling quite well. Phil can't do anything but be there for Wilbur.

Wilbur still walks around, he still plays a lot of video games and he still attempts to read a lot of books, which means he inevitably gets bored because Wilbur does not have the attention span for reading.

It gets to the point where even Techno tries reading to him.

That works slightly better.

Instead, it mostly ends with Wilbur rambling and speaking a lot of the time. Techno suggests that Wilbur joins a fandom, Wilbur just gives him the flattest look and Techno fell out of his chair laughing.

Right now, Wilbur is rambling, and Phil doesn't even mind.

He's heard a lot of Wilbur's ramblings, but he's enthralled either way, Wilbur's a good person to listen to. And so because of his practice, and genuine interest, he's always been able to listen to his long rants more than Techno has been.

"It's easily his best book, by the way," Wilbur explains, putting both of his hands out in front of him, "It follows the perspective of a young girl— like a little six-year-old, so the language is simple, and we the audience know what she's talking about, so there's this tension. Because the audience know what the character don't, often it's the other way especially with stories like this, and she's such a compelling narrator."

Techno gives him a flat look.

“You should read it,” Wilbur mumbles, “You’d probably like ‘A Man Called Ove’, it’s so good and it’s about a grumpy old man.”

“I’m younger than you?” Techno says slowly.

Wilbur waves a hand dismissively, “Then there’s Britt-Marie, she kinda sucks in this book but she has her own story and it’s so good. It ends with her not choosing either of the love interests and that’s super rare in contemporary fiction. All of his books just have so much life in them, how can you not love them. Do not even get me started on ‘Beartown’.

“You don’t even read,” Techno mutters, “How do you know this—”

His phone resting on his leg buzzes.

Phil pulls a face, there’s not many people that can get through to him right now.

He frowns, tilting his head slightly.

There’s an email, with the subject: *Wilbur’s Working Arrangements*

Phil almost lets himself relax, someone just discussing when he’s going to get back to work. Phil can respond later— his shoulders hitch up when he sees who sent it. It’s not an assistant it’s— the man himself.

That terrifies him.

He immediately opens the email.

Wilbur will resume work in a month. We believe this is a reasonable amount of time to give him to recover considering the shortage of heroes and the national situation regarding both Elysium and the protests in Logstedchire.

This is not up for negotiation.

Sincerely, William Nelson-Jones, Head of the Hero Committee

Phil stares at it.

A month?

Wilbur will be lucky to be cleared for work in *six* months, a month is unreasonable and he knows that William knows it. Phil sits there for a few moments, he starts biting his nails, it's a habit he's been trying to break since he was ten.

Obviously, he has not done it.

He glares at his phone.

His phone doesn't glare back.

Phil would be an idiot for not trying to negotiate this.

It's a system setting Wilbur up to fail, as if Wilbur hasn't risked enough in this job. He clenches his fist and unclenches it.

This is an obvious set up. To get Phil angry and get him to go into the tower—he knows that, he knows that he's being fucked with, and manipulated, he's so used to it, that it's become a

second layer washing over his skin.

Still.

He is furious.

He is so angry he can barely think, his entire body feels warm and his face feels even warmer than that. His entire thoughts are a mess, just mostly him stewing in his rage and violent thoughts about William.

And so he hesitates for a moment when he sees Techno and Wilbur both looking at him, concern on their faces.

“Just have to go sort something out at work,” Phil scowls at his phone even more, like that will make this go away. Like he can fix this with nothing but a scowl, he can’t— this system was fucked before Phil stepped in it, and now he’s drowning in it.

Techno raises an eyebrow, “But—”

Even if this is bait— Phil can’t risk letting this slide, in case Wilbur does have to go back to work in a month because of this. It’s a clear bait— it’s such clear bait and Phil shouldn’t take it so easily but he loves his kids too much to not check that out at least.

It feels like a trap.

Still, Phil stands up out of his seat, ignoring the two concerned glimpses from both Wilbur and Techno. They only know an extent of Phil’s rampages regarding the tower and policies they try, they’ve never seen the brunt of it.

Right now, anyone in his way is about to receive the brunt of his anger.

He barely remembers the car drive.

He barely remembers even getting out of his car or parking it.

What he does remember with astounding clarity is walking into the tower with the confidence of a man who has done this time and time again (he has.) It's gotten to the point where the older guards can recognise when he's on a frenzy and leave him alone.

Today he is not that lucky.

Someone tries to stop him as he storms into the tower, someone grabs his arm.

He hears Kristin call them off immediately.

Phil doesn't even mumble a thank you to Kristin as he passes, he barely even looks at her. He can't think of anything but the rage in his body, he can't think of anything but how *angry* he is.

Elevator.

Second top floor.

Someone, once again, tries to stop him, grabbing his arm.

Phil brushes them off easily, using his wing to push them further away.

He hates this place.

This entire floor is dedicated to the few people who work here, the people who work for the hero committee are on the floors sandwiched either side of the SBI floor. This floor is just for the committee themselves.

Because of that, Phil pauses for a few seconds.

He takes a deep breath, staring at the double door in front of him. The frame is so much fancier than it has to be, with ornate, decorated wood, he doesn't even know what the ornatation is of, just that it looks fancy.

Then Phil rips the doors open.

They fling open and Phil walks in.

This room has always felt too clean, it's a big room itself. There's a table shaped line an upside down 'u', in the middle, of course, is William Nelson-Jones, and Phil tries to not have his heart beat out of his chest.

Everyone apart from Aiden Reeves is here.

Phil scowls at everyone around him. A few of them have papers out and are clearly talking to each other. The windows to the side of them illuminate everything, and for everything the natural light can't touch, there is a large, swinging artificial light.

There's a plot plant in the corner, along with several photos of every iteration of the hero committee on the far wall, the wall behind William. There's a flag of L'Manberg hanging up, along with some shitty art on the wall opposite to the window.

Apart from that, there's a large white board, a seat centred in the middle of the upside down 'u' shape table and a rug on the ground which does not flatter the sharp, clean lines of this

room at all.

Phil is immediately met with seven pairs of eyes.

He grits his teeth.

Vaguely he's aware of a guard trying to grab him, but Phil shakes them off easily, and gives them a look sharp enough that they know to *back the fuck down*. He walks forwards in the room, meeting William's eyes.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" Phil snaps, he shoves the chair out of the way and stands in the middle of the room. "What the *fuck* is wrong with you? Wilbur has been awake for two weeks— he can't work for another six months."

"We are running short of staff," William replies easily, he looks down at his papers as if Phil is nothing more than an inconvenience. "We can not have anyone out for that long, your child or not."

"My child or not?" Phil yells, "My child or not? He almost died! His lungs were almost squished against his fucking ribs and spine— and you have the audacity to ignore what that doctor's are saying because we're *short staffed*? Wilbur will die if he has to work the way he is now, he can barely walk."

William's eyes dart up from the paper, he tilts his head slightly. "Interesting."

"You will give him the time off that the doctor's said," Phil snaps, he points at William and they all pretend that he's not shaking. He stalks forwards towards the desk and puts both of his hands on the desk.

William flinches back.

“You will follow medical orders, you are not beyond that. Wilbur will—”

“Train harder,” William says, “You can not expect me to have our number two hero off the field for six months at a time like this.”

“That is very literally what I am expecting,” Phil returns, “So help my Prime— I am at my breaking point with you. I really am. The only reason I haven’t burnt this fucking place to the ground is because my kids are still here, do not doubt me— I will. So try me. Try this, try threatening my kids and pushing them to work before they’re medically cleared.”

Phil leans forwards, leaning in William’s space, and William shuffles back slightly.

“Fucking. Try. Me.” Phil whispers.

His voice is less of a threat, Phil doesn’t need to threaten these people. He needs to promise them, his voice is a promise, a guarantee of what Phil can do— of what he will do if this keeps moving forwards.

He will burn this place to the ground if they’re not careful.

“You’re talking very dangerously Phil,” William adds in his low tone, which makes everyone look towards him, “Is it— Techno, right, that is believed to know the real identity of Theseus?”

“Don’t bring Techno into this. This conversation is about Wilbur—”

“If I believe correctly, Techno is still carrying out a life sentence... here, that was the deal you made was it not? He’d be saved from Pandora’s and work for us, until either he retired or something else impeded his work.”

Phil needs to go back to the dentist with how much he’s grinding his teeth together.

“If another law was broken by Techno... we simply could not ignore it, such as his clear harbouring of Theseus. He’d have to go Pandora’s, as is the law. No more of your loopholes Phil, you’ve played around with us for long enough—”

“Played around with you?” Phil yells, looking William in the eyes, “You adopted me when I was ten, *William*, because I had wings because I was homeless and had nowhere to live, you used me from the age of *ten*. I was a child in every sense of the word. Then you— fake my son’s death—the one you forced me to take care of, and don’t tell me he’s alive for *three days*? Then you dare, you fucking *dare* threaten Techno, after everything? And you have the audacity to say I’m the one fucking around with you? Now you are threatening me with Techno’s safety and freedom? And you think that—”

He slams his hands on the table, and the people around him jump.

Phil doesn’t care.

“I was the perfect fucking hero for *so long*,” Phil spits out, “Did your stupid fucking training, I was ten. I was ten years old, you took my fucking childhood from me! And you took it from my kids and I will not let you take more of their happiness. You have taken so much from me and my family and— what else do you want from me?”

His voice borders on desperate at the end, no matter how hard Phil tries, it always feels like there’s a part of him trying to please this man. He doesn’t want to, he doesn’t need it, but the less rational part of him does.

And there it is. Phil knows that this was just a long ploy to get Phil to offer something, he knows that deep down. That’s always how it’s been, William knows him well enough to do this and know it’ll work. And Phil hates that. He hates that William ever got allowed to know him well enough to do— this.

“What else do you want from me?” Phil whispers again, not hiding the desperation, “To leave them alone. You’ve hated them since they were young. You hate them, you hate them so much and you won’t let them fucking breathe because of it. What else do you need from me, William?”

William scowls at him.

Phil wants to look at the other committee members to see their reactions, to see if any of them have a shred of compassion left, but Phil forces himself to look at the man who claimed to raise him.

“I’ll bring in Theseus, I’ll— crack down on Elysium, I’ll lead the charge if I have to. What can I do to make you leave my kids alone? I’m offering it all, you trained me, you know what I can do.”

William tilts his head, “Oh, the Theseus offer is... tempting.”

So that’s what he wants.

Phil knows that Theseus hasn’t been seen in weeks— a month and a half by now, he knows that people think he’s dead, he also knows the chances of Phil bringing Theseus in are very low. He also knows that he will do anything to stop William from hating Techno and Wilbur and this is the easiest way to keep them safe.

He doesn’t know if he’ll find Theseus, or if he could bring himself to arrest him.

“Any vigilante,” William says, and Phil’s eyes dart back up. “Any vigilante, that’s all I ask. Wilbur can get his full medical leave, I will never threaten Techno with Pandora’s ever again — in fact, maybe we could remove that clause from his contract entirely.”

And William is desperate.

Phil knows that, and he notes it with a dull feeling as he’s trying to process everything else. If he wasn’t desperate, he wouldn’t give up on those things to hold over Phil’s head. He’s held shit like this over Phil’s head for *years* , even before Techno and Wilbur.

“I don’t trust you to follow through.”

“Bring me a vigilante and you can find out if I’m to be trusted.”

Phil shakes his head, “I can’t ruin someone’s life if you can turn around and ruin their lives...” Phil hesitates for a few seconds. “If you don’t follow through, I will quit. I will try and probably succeed in taking Techno and Wilbur with me.”

William’s eyes flash for a moment.

There it is.

That’s what Phil’s needed this entire time.

The one thing William does not want out of this scenario.

“I’ll have my lawyer write it into our contracts,” Phil returns, “Sign off on it, and you have yourself a deal. Aurelian, Purpled, Theseus or Slimecicle. I’ll find one of them, in return you leave my kids alone.”

William hums, sitting back in his chair, “Fine.”

“Fine?”

“Fine.

Phil sighs, his shoulders relaxing.

“You know...” William says slowly, and Phil looks up at him, shoulders immediately tensed. “Your son took a similar deal.”

Phil could almost feel his brain short circuit, and his mouth dropped open slightly. It would have been Wilbur, for sure, Techno had slightly more consistent morals than the other one, and Wilbur wanted more than Techno wanted.

“What for?” Phil says.

“Theseus in exchange for the prosthetic wings that Sam has been working on,” William says, he tuts in false disappointment, “However, I think he almost let himself get attached, a dumb decision if I am being quite frank with you. Don’t you ever wonder about why he just started attacking Theseus?”

Phil had not thought about it.

“Theseus had been active for three years before he became *Theseus*,” William stresses.

“Why are you telling me this?” Phil snaps.

William just smiles, a sickening smile that Phil wants to punch off of his stupid face. Instead of doing that he clenches his fists and just stares ahead at him. He can’t punch William, not yet, no matter how badly he wants to—

“I just hope you don’t fail like him,” William says, on his face is a twisted smile, it’s an attempt to be friendly but Phil can see the condensation very easily, it’s not even like he’s being subtle.

Still, it makes Phil’s blood boil.

Phil takes a deep breath, “They’re under my protection,” he repeats, “Quackity, Techno, Wilbur, Shubble, Daniel Greyson, Thomas Underscore, Kristin Mors. They are all safe from your bullshittery.”

“Half the damn tower is under your protection,” William spits out.

“Damn fucking right it is,” Phil whispers, “Be thankful you got me doing this shit, rather than my kids. They do not have the patience I do, or the will to keep themselves safe.”

William scowls.

Phil takes a deep breath, before jabbing a finger in William’s direction. “If you dare threaten my kid again, I will fucking end you. I have had enough of your bullshit, and I know lots of other people have.”

A moment of silence.

Phil just looks at William.

He will not cry. He will not cry in front of William.

“If you ever cared about me, in any way— leave me alone,” Phil whispers, it sounds incredibly pathetic, he is aware, “You’ve done enough. Just... leave me and my kids alone. I’ll do your stupid training and what you ask of me— you’ve already ruined my life enough, just... leave me alone.”

It feels like William glares into his soul.

He manages to break eye contact, a task that feels much harder than Phil would like to pretend it does.

Then he turns on his heel and walks out.

He slams the doors shut behind him.

It shakes the entire wall.

He can't cry over this.

He gets in the elevator, taking himself as far away from those fucking people as he can.

It's been years, Phil isn't scared of William anymore. He knows he's a weak man who is clinging onto whatever power he can, and he knows that power will run out within Phil's lifetime and he knows—

His hands are shaking still.

He gets out of the elevator.

And he knows that he's still scared of William Nelson-Jones, deep, deep down. The same way that Wilbur is still scared of Eret, and Techno was still scared of the ring leader.

You never really forget the first person who hurts you.

And in Phil's case, it seems that he'll never not be scared of him.

There's no bruise on the side of his face, but he can feel it burning there like how it did when he was ten.

He has a hospital to go to.

He has a son to see.

So he leaves.

When Aimsey told Guqqie to *'find someone who can hack for our first meeting'* she was not expecting this. She was maybe expecting like— someone they could hire, or a university student who was in their last years.

Instead of all of those viable options, Aimsey just stares at Guqqie, who is standing in front of him, with a... child by her side.

Not a *child, child*, but a child in the way that Aimsey is still a child. They all stare at each other for a long moment, unsure of what to say.

The kid, who probably has a name but Aimsey hasn't cared to learn it in the twenty seconds they've known him. He has shaggy brown hair, with a fringe that is far too long and in his eyes. On the side of his face and going down his neck, probably to his shoulder as well, is a large burn scar. The way his hair is positioned that most of the burn is hidden, and Aimsey knows that's no purpose.

“What the fuck is that?” Aimsey gestures at the kid.

The kid scowls at being a ‘that’.

“Uh— that’s a Tubbo,” Guqqie says with an awkward smile, “ Tubbo, that’s Aimsey and Sniff, they both use all pronouns. Tubbo’s in my computer science class— he’s in high school but getting university credits because he’s a genius or something.

“No...” Tubbo says quietly, “Uh— I just really like computers.”

Aimsey and Sniff glance at each other.

Aimsey grabs Guqqie, pulling her forwards and leaning close, “Did you really just find a random kid from your computing class to help us take down the heroes? Who does that— Guqqie the fuck?”

“You told me to find someone who can hack! I found them—”

Tubbo clears his throat, “Uh— look, I’m really on board with taking down the heroes or whatever you lot have planned I just gotta know... do I have your protection?”

“Huh?” Aimsey asks, turning around, “What do you mean?”

“Well...” Tubbo walks to the side, picking up a book from the coffee table and turning it over, looking at the back of it. “I may or may not have a couple of people, who may or may not want me dead.”

“Who the fuck is he?” Aimsey yells, gesturing between Guqqie and Tubbo, “Why does he need protection— why do you need protection, who the fuck is after you?”

“Uh... his name is Punz,” Tubbo says slowly, “He kinda— shot a firework at me, not a huge fan of him.”

“What does Punz *want* from you?”

“That information is... confidential,” Tubbo says, “I just need a promise that you guys will save my ass if I agree to join— whatever this is. You’re two hero trainees, you two are great to have onside.”

This is a wild card, Aimsey knows that Tubbo— and whatever he can bring is almost certainly a wildcard. While he might be very skilled at what he does, Aimsey has a dreadful feeling that Tubbo will bring a whole bunch of problems and threats but— he seems to be skilled, he holds himself with an air of both knowingness and pretentious.

He’s not arrogant though, he seems to know what he can do.

And... Aimsey isn’t sure if he can leave him by himself, he’s going to be in trouble either way, it’s just a matter of if he has a support network around him—

Aimsey sighs, “What can you do?”

“Uh— what do you want me to do?”

“What *do* we want him to do?” Sniff asks, “How do you judge if someone can hack?”

“I mean... I have records from City Hall... well, kinda, the hard drive got lost— it’s a long story. But I’ve gotten into that before— I realise I can’t really prove that uh— I have an A in the class Guqqie and I are in—”

“Hack into our school records,” Guqqie says, “There you go.”

“Isn’t that a federal crime?” Sniff asks.

“I feel like plotting against the government is a federal crime,” Aimsey adds, walking towards Tubbo and picking the book out of his hands, putting that on the ground. “If we wanted information from the hero's tower what would be the best way to do that?”

“Uh— well... I dunno if they have a server room or what their deal is— but that's going to be super secure, what will probably have less security is personal devices, if that's also connected to the network but remotely—”

“I have no clue what any of this means...” Sniff says, “None of us are computer people.”

Tubbo sighs, looking around before grabbing a receipt on the coffee table and a pen, before walking up to the dining table and gathering the three of them around him.

“Alright. The network.”

He draws box in the corner, and labels it ‘*Server*’, from that he draws three branches out of it, and three boxes which he labels ‘*PC's*’ then from that he draws a line off one of the PC boxes and writes ‘*Phones*’ next to it.

“Alright, this is how I reckon it's set up— I have no proof of this most big businesses are this way.”

“How did you know that?”

“Dabbled in industrial espionage as a kid,” Tubbo says, as if that's a normal thing any seventeen-year-old should ever say.

He moves on as if it is normal and Aimsey once again finds himself wondering *who the fuck is this kid?*

“Basically,” Tubbo continues, “Is that the computers are connected to the server, that has all the protections and stuff, the phone— can generally access files remotely, again this might not be the case. So it goes through the computer, to the server and the thing with phones is that you can usually bypass the lockscreen, police can do it all the time—”

“Nelson-Jones doesn’t have a phone,” Sniff adds, “Not a mobile phone, he has a flip phone. He doesn’t need to make calls to anyone, everyone is making the calls to him.”

Silence.

Tubbo looks like he’d embrace the sweet relief of death.

“Well then— either someone’s going in to do some routine tests on the WiFi and we get admin access that way—”

“Unlikely, they’re tightening up their security,” Aimsey says, arms crossed, “They’ll be using internal people to do that. If not they’d do a background check on a background check and I don’t think even you can create a fake identity solid enough.”

Tubbo just stares at her for a few moments. “Aimsey... what’s your last name, might I ask?”

“Teese.”

“Aimsey Teese,” Tubbo says, taking a step forwards. “I have faked my identity since the age of eleven, I have fake identities for two of my friends and one of my friends has a job at the hero tower. Which he got with my help—”

“Wait, you have a who at the what—”

“Nevermind,” Tubbo says smoothly, “I can do fake identities, I can forge documents you think wouldn’t exist— please do not underestimate me and I won’t underestimate you.

Alright? I know my skills, I'm not bragging I just... can do them?"

Aimsey crosses their arms, "Tubbo... who the *fuck* are you, you're saying you can—"

"Have. I have forged several government documents."

"Done all this crazy shit!" Aimsey says, "You've had a firework shot at you— dabbled in industrial espionage I don't even know what that means! Can hack computers with a weird amount of accuracy— knows all these systems— who are you running from why are you—"

Tubbo shoves his hands in his pockets, rocking back and forth on his heels. "Y'know, I've been around."

"You've been around?" Guqqie repeats slowly.

"Well— alright," Tubbo says, "I... barely know you three, I'm not gonna just start dropping secrets I haven't told some of my closest friends... I just need protection."

"Has no loyalty to the cause," Sniff adds, tilting her head at Tubbo.

Aimsey turns to her. "Huh?"

"He's not gonna go out on the same limbs we will," Sniff stands up, approaching Tubbo, and Tubbo seems to know a threat when it approaches him.

Aimsey watches as Tubbo almost completely freezes up as Sniff grabs him by the front of the shirt, not lifting him off the ground or anything, just pulling him forwards and letting go.

Tubbo staggers back.

“I’ll let you know,” Sniff says, “If you hurt Guqqie or Aimsey, you will have *hell* to pay for it — I can manipulate bone and I will remove your femur if you’re not careful about it—”

“Alright, alright!” Aimsey says, grabbing Sniff and pulling her backwards, “Alright. Please do not threaten Tubbo he’s done nothing.”

Tubbo just stares ahead, hands shaking by his sides.

Guqqie sighs, “Sniff, you scared the living daylights out of him. Apologise.”

“He needs to know—”

Tubbo grabs Guqqie’s arm, and Guqqie jumps slightly, eyes finding Tubbo’s.

“What are we even doing here?” Tubbo asks, before glancing at Sniff and Aimsey, “No one has told me what we’re trying to do— I just got asked if I could hack. I can hack, and I don’t mind breaking the law. What’s actually happening?”

A beat of silence.

“Let’s sit down...” Aimsey says.

Everyone sits down.

Tubbo glances at them, then down at his feet.

“You know Elysium?” Aimsey asks slowly.

Tubbo's eyes dart up to her.

Aimsey doesn't... know a lot about a lot, but he hasn't seen that look on someone's face before, not like this. It's something like dread and anger messed into one, but genuine fear, and considering Tubbo is genuinely afraid of Elysium—

That makes Aimsey uneasy.

“Yeah,” Tubbo whispers, “Yeah— Elysium. Know ‘em. Don’t like ‘em.”

“Know the heroes?” Guqqie adds.

Tubbo just stares at her, dead-faced.

“Don’t you think...” Aimsey says slowly, she watches all of Tubbo’s reaction, “That this entire hero or Elysium thing is bullshit. I mean— they’re both pretty harmful and neither are doing much to make the world better. The heroes stopped the villain attacks and Elysium are — doing whatever Elysium do that I’m sure isn’t terrible.”

Tubbo just blinks at them, “Okay— just... where are you going with this?”

“Elysium aren’t doing shit,” Sniff says and Tubbo flinches at her voice slightly. “They’re actively harmful. Innocent people are dying, we know there has to be a better way to— *fix* the heroes.”

Tubbo glances between all of them.

“Fix? You mean like— fix the hero committee?”

“Make them better— make them— less corrupt, make them less bad?” Aimsey says, “I dunno how else we can word this. We do it again, we force a bunch of new people in— they’ll know people are watching them, that we could take them down again.”

“We... force them into accountability?” Tubbo asks slowly.

“We flush out the fucked people— all of them, they won’t be intimidated. We force them to be fired, or quit. Then we— maybe threaten the new people,” Aimsey shakes their head, “I don’t know. We need blackmail either way.”

All of them lay quiet.

“We break into the tower... find information on all of these people?” Tubbo says slowly, “You want blackmail?”

“I want to know all of their crimes,” Aimsey says, their voice is low and filled with something so far beyond contempt that it is unreal, even Sniff looks at them with wide eyes because of it. “I want to know all of their crimes and I want to expose them, I want to burn that place to the fucking ground and I will *enjoy* it. They’ve hurt too many people and gotten away with it for far too long.”

Tubbo looks down at his feet.

Guqqie and Sniff glance at each other, and then at Tubbo.

“I— I dunno,” Tubbo whispers, “I really don’t know. This is a lot, and I know other people have tried it before and—”

Aimsey hums, before leaning backwards.

“I’m not asking you to devote your life to this,” she says with a deep sigh, “I know. I really know— just consider it, I guess, that’s what I’m asking you to do. Consider it— all of it.”

Tubbo frowns.

“Do you want to change the world for the better?”

“I want to live more than I want to change the world,” Tubbo returns sharply, “I’m not the hero type, dunno if you got that from all of this—” he gestures at his face and the burn scar, “I tend to run before things get bad.”

Aimsey tilts their head, xe leans forwards slightly, frowning. “Why haven’t you left the country then?”

“Huh?”

“You obviously have some sort of attachment and loyalty for this place,” Aimsey continues, “You live here— don’t you want to see it better. You already have people who want you dead — you said it yourself.”

Tubbo groans, running a hand down his face. “It’s a big ask. You’re asking a lot.”

“I know,” Aimsey returns quietly, “I know it’s risky, I think it’s worth it though.”

“I—” Tubbo sighs, “Okay... okay. But I have conditions.”

Guqqie and Sniff both straighten up at this.

“I can walk away whenever I want to— within reason,” Tubbo adds the last bit seeing the look on Aimsey’s face. “I have protection from both of you and if I ask you, you will drop everything to come and save my sorry ass.”

Sniff and Aimsey glance at each other.

“That’s all?” Sniff asks slowly, he leans forwards slightly, tilting his head. “I mean— you can’t walk away in the middle of a mission, but I assumed you knew that. And sometimes we can’t just drop everything but as soon as we can we will.”

Tubbo sighs, closing his eyes. “Okay... yeah— that’ll— sure.”

Sniff tilts her head slightly, “What’s wrong?”

“You all need to accept that you might find my body,” Tubbo says, “People really want me dead, and I’m a huge liability. I can risk— all of this.”

“We don’t care,” Guqqie is the first person to speak after a long moment of silence, “Those two might— but I’m not going to lose my humanity just because someone might want you dead. I don’t want to mourn a friend—”

“We’re friends?”

“We can be,” Guqqie continues, “And— I think you’re safer in a group.”

Tubbo nods.

Aimsey watches as it’s like a marionette has it’s strings cut off, and Tubbo folds in on himself, his proper posture is gone and he hunches over himself. It looks like he’s about to cry, but he manages to hold that in.

“You’ve been on edge for a while,” Aimsey says, they stand up and sit down next to Tubbo. “We’re gonna try keep you safe, Tubbo.”

Tubbo just looks up at xem with red-rimmed eyes, “Yeah— yeah, that’s— yeah.”

“Please don’t cry,” Sniff says and Aimsey shoots them a sharp look. “Please— if you start crying Aimsey will start crying. They’re emotional.”

“Which isn’t a weakness,” Guqqie stresses. It’s a conversation which Guqqie and Sniff have apparently had before, considering the way Sniff rolls their eyes. “You’re okay. If you need to cry then you can cry.”

Tubbo sighs, “Whatever. Fine. Shut up.”

They’re all quiet for a long moment, Aimsey sitting next to Tubbo as Tubbo seems to be attempting to not cry, he manages to keep it together pretty well, if even some tears slide from his eyes.

“Important thing,” Guqqie breaks the minutes long silence, “If— if we’re gonna be a team, we *need* a team name.”

“We do not—” Tubbo starts.

“That is a spectacular idea,” Sniff says, “I’ll Google some shit. There’s four of us— alright, okay. Can do.”

“We don’t need a team name,” Tubbo groans, “Please— we have better things to be planning. Our first mission as a team is to sneak into the *fucking heroes tower* that is not easy.”

All of them look at Tubbo.

Aimsey included.

This is clearly a kid who has never had fun in his fucking life, and that twists something in Aimsey's stomach.

Poor kid.

Instead, Aimsey tilts their head slightly and sighs. "It's just some fun, this doesn't hurt."

Tubbo scowls, looking down at the ground.

"Something with four," Sniff mumbles underneath her breath, scrolling through their phone. Guqqie is doing the same, sitting with her leg hugged up to her chest as she thinks, scrolling frantically. "Do we wanna go with the Greek theme? Theseus— Elysium— it seems to be a new *anything* these days you gotta have a Greek mythology name."

"Anemoi," Tubbo mumbles underneath his breath.

Everyone looks up at him.

"Huh?" Aimsey is the first to speak, "Do you know Greek or—"

"It's the mythology for seasons, how the seasons work. There's four. Boreas, Zephyrus, Notus and Eurus. Then there's the four lesser winds, but those are the main four."

"Why do you... know that?" Aimsey asks slowly, "I'm impressed but—"

“I know Greek mythology,” Tubbo deadpans, “You may have had a Percy Jackson phase—me too, to be honest, but I also had a phase where I learnt Greek and that was a whole thing. Please don’t get me to speak Greek, I basically forgot it all. But I read like— The Iliad and stuff. Virgil and—”

“Like from Sanders Sides?” Guqqie asks.

“No... who’s that? Like the Greek—”

“You don’t know Sanders Sides?”

“... no?”

“I have so much to teach you,” Guqqie says, then looks at Sniff, “Do *you* know Sanders Sides.”

“No.”

“Holy fuck,” Guqqie says, “How are you queer and don’t know what— nevermind, that’s fine, we’ll come back to that later. Anemoi, is that the name we’re going for?”

“Who’s gonna be who?” Aimsey asks.

Guqqie and Sniff scramble for their phones, Guqqie must bring up the Wikipedia page first because she starts talking.

“Notus was the Greek god of the south wind. He was associated with the desiccating hot wind of the rise of Sirius after midsummer, was thought to bring the storms of late summer and early autumn, and was feared as a destroyer of crops,” Guqqie reads off, they scroll down a bit murmuring words that they read. “Blah, blah, Zephyrus! The gentlest of the winds, Zephyrus is known as the fructifying wind, the messenger of spring.”

Aimsey hums.

“Boreas is the god of the north wind and the harshest of the Anemoi,” Guqqie skims over some of the other stuff again, “And then Eurus is a wind of storm, described as a turbulent wind during storms and tossing ships on the sea.”

Guqqie looks up, “Well... who wants to be who? As far as I can see there isn’t like— a leader of all of this so... it’s really just up to preference.”

“How is this one of our first priorities?” Tubbo asks, “We are planning of breaking into the tower to find blackmail on all of the hero committee and this is our first line of thought.”

“Yes, yes it is,” Sniff says, “I want to be Boreas. The harshest of the winds.”

“Sounds angsty,” Aimsey adds, and Guqqie gives a knowing nod.

“What does that even mean—” Sniff starts.

Guqqie gives them a look, “Sniff, I know you’ve only been like out in the functional world for— two months.”

“A month.”

“But you are in desperate need of learning any pop knowledge— and how people our age actually speak, and also how to change your lockscreen because that is just sad.”

“Phones are confusing if you’ve never seen one before,” Sniff returns, “Whatever— I’m Boreas. That leaves Zephyrus, Eurus and Notus.”

“I think Tubbo should be the destroyer of crops wind,” Guqqie says brightly and Tubbo scowls at them, “I think it makes sense, like Autumn vibes, not quite warm, not quite cold but somewhere very much in between.”

Tubbo sighs.

Aimsey just smiles, leaning against their hand and watching Tubbo. Tubbo is an interesting person to watch, and while Aimsey isn’t the best at body language and reading on people’s signals, she tends to be too busy being loud and amazing to notice this stuff. They do know that Tubbo is desperately trying to be reserved, and failing quite miserably.

“And Aimsey should be Zephyrus,” Guqqie continues, “Because he’s like all warm and Summer vibes, gentle and caring and Spring— it suits.”

“Zephyrus is more Spring than Summer—”

“New life!” Guqqie says, turning on Sniff, “Aimsey could totally represent new life and second chances and whatever else Spring represents. This feels like something new, something fresh, and Aimsey kinda... did a lot of that.”

Aimsey desperately tries to pretend that her face has not gone bright red, they look down at the ground, desperately attempting to avoid Sniff’s gaze as they know that Sniff will be staring into Aimsey’s fucking soul.

Alright. Cool. Cool. Cool.

That’s a thing that’s happened.

“And I guess that leaves me with Eurus,” Guqqie says, “Unpredictable and can topple ships — I like the sound of that.”

Tubbo snorts, “You seem quite rational and reasonable if I have to be honest with you.”

“Oh, you have *not* met me,” Guqqie says with a smile, “Anyway— I think that all sounds good... do we have any other things for today, or can I immediately go show Tubbo and Sniff Sanders Sides?”

Aimsey is too red to say much more than just squeak.

“Cool, Tubbo, come over here. So first of all you have Roman— he basically represents—”

Sniff leans towards Aimsey, his tone is so quiet that Aimsey can barely hear it, “I’m pretty sure Guqqie allocated everyone so she could flirt with you.”

Guqqie talks animatedly about Sanders Sides, and Tubbo seems to be listening, if only out of politeness.

Aimsey slides down in her seat, pulling the beanie over their face.

Sniff laughs the hardest Aimsey has ever heard.

When Phil gets back to the hospital his hands aren’t shaking anymore, but the pit of anxiety in his stomach hasn’t lessened either. It seems to swirl around and threaten to take ahold of him completely.

Phil is able to take deep breaths and push it away as he walks through the hospital. He can see the floor, the walls, some shitty artwork on the walls, a cute drawing of a lion that’s down

closer to the floor, like a child scribbled on the wall. The air smells like clean, and everything that most people dislike about hospitals.

He's almost entirely calmed down by the time that he gets to the hospital, but there's a spike of anxiety— what if something's worsened and Phil wasn't here?

Trying to bite down the panic, he steps into the room.

All of them are there.

Techno is sitting on a chair, Daniel is hovering by the door and Tommy is sitting on Wilbur's bed, telling a dramatic story with his hands, leaning back slightly and talking at about a million miles an hour.

Phil moves so he's standing next to Daniel, he's leaning against the side of the wall, staring at Wilbur, Tommy and Techno. Phil has a feeling he wants to move in, he doesn't know if that's right, but Phil vaguely recognises the look.

If Tommy reminds Phil of himself, Daniel is Techno through and through.

Phil stops, leaning slightly towards Daniel. "You can go sit down," he whispers.

"You don't have to stand there like you've been banished from the room," Phil had said and Techno had just looked at him. The flat, deadpanned expression on his face barely wavered. "Wil wants to see you."

"Don't do this," Phil had said, grabbing Techno's arm and Techno looked up at him, something that was almost guilt on his face. "He doesn't blame you. You don't control what Eret does."

"I'm the reason they met," Techno grit out, "I am very directly to blame—"

“Well, Wilbur doesn’t think that. And he’s going to be more hurt the longer you avoid him.”

Techno scowled, before shaking off Phil’s arm and walking into the room. The expression on his face barely changed from the scowl it was when Phil first saw him. Phil resisted the urge to sigh.

He worried about that kid.

He’s worried about Daniel.

“And then— and then— this fucking frog flies out of nowhere,” Tommy says brightly, “And jumps on my friend’s face. We’re like five and screaming because— y’know there’s a frog now on my best friend’s face. We bothered the entire neighbourhood that day—”

Daniel frowns slightly, “Techno didn’t tell you?”

“Considering I have no clue what you’re talking about, no,” Phil says.

Daniel nods, pulling an expression that he tries to school but it’s clear that there’s pain on his face.

Phil nudges him with his elbow, “C’mon. Wilbur’s just gonna be offended if you don’t go and say hi.”

“I don’t think Wilbur likes me all that much,” Daniel says, mouth pressed into a thin line as he glares at the scene before him like it’s wronged him specifically.

Phil makes a noise, looking at the scene as well.

Tommy is half leaning on Wilbur, and the pair of them are managing to squish onto the bed. Tommy and Wilbur sitting next to each other, with Tommy falling half off the bed.

Wilbur is smiling, a bright thing and Phil is so glad that he's smiling a little bit because after the days of stillness and silence... it's nice. It's so nice. Wilbur doesn't have a lot of movement available to him, but he looks comfortable as Tommy swings his arms around, telling his dramatic story about a frog.

Techno seems a bit more cautious, eyes glancing to the heart monitor every couple of moments, but he looks the most relaxed he has in several days. Arms crossed, head tilted back slightly as he listens to Tommy's dramatic story.

Then Phil glances back at Daniel, staring there, just... watching the almost domestic scene in front of him.

Techno glances up eventually, his eyes meet Phil's.

There's a moment of knowingness that passes between the two of them, and Phil wants to know when him and Techno started being able to pass the looks that were tied with parenting. When did Techno start understanding how to parent a teenager?

"Daniel," Techno says, and Daniel's head snaps up towards him. "Have you ever had a frog fly at your face?"

"No."

"Have you ever seen a frog in person?"

"No. Didn't grow up on a fuckin' farm," Daniel walks forwards, he takes the chair furthest away from Wilbur but glances at him. "Nice to see you're awake..." he pauses for a few

seconds, before apparently deciding that was too nice, “Jackass.”

Wilbur just smiles at him. “Nice to see you too, Daniel. How I missed your— kind words.”

“Shut the fuck up,” Daniel responds.

Wilbur just laughs, leaning back into his pillow slightly.

They’ll be okay.

Wilbur will be okay, everyone will be okay.

Phil leans back into his chair, watching everyone, Wilbur, Techno, Tommy and Daniel. Wilbur looks beat up and hurt, but he’s breathing. Techno looks exhausted but he looks relieved, almost relaxed. Tommy looks as stressed as always and Daniel looks like he’s not going to let his guard down for anything.

That paranoia and fear and the trauma of whatever they’ve just gone through won’t be done overnight, it probably won’t ever be done, there’s apartments to rebuild and Wilbur has to live somewhere and it’s not over...

But they’re all okay and breathing.

Wilbur manages a joke.

That’s worth enough.

today's meme brought to you by... me.



Chapter Summary

- Chapter starts out with some of the most introspective writing I've ever done. It's very good, it's about Phil and the fact he didn't want to be a father. But he wouldn't change it for anything
- WE GET SOME PHIL & TOMMY BONDING! While Phil keeps moving through his life with Wilbur still in hospital, on life support. Techno is stressed, and him and Phil have a funky conversation on the bathroom floor about their childhoods and kinda parenting (it's complicated)
- OH MY GOD PURPLED. He's gone through some shit which he tells Techno. Basically Punz grabbed him one night and beat the shit out of him so Purpled told him where Wilbur lived. Also Purpled almost joined Elysium at one point, it was a whole thing.
- Wilbur wakes up :D, and genuinely he seems mostly fine
- Phil fights the hero committee who wants Wilbur to return to work almost asap, Phil says that it'll kill him. He says he'll capture a vigilante if William Nelson-Jones (who btw raised Phil... that's important) promises to leave Wilbur & Techno alone (and some others), William agrees.
- WE GET OUR 5/5 SBI (and fuck off. Tina!purpled is part of SBI in this and i will FIGHT YOU ON THIS), and everything seems like it's gonna be okay!!!

HELLO! Yes, Purpled's Barbie Princess Charm School rant is based on my questions, and YES I have watched the movie enough times I know all the scenes well enough to have one of my characters talk about it. Don't. Question. It.

ALSO. YOU FINALLY MET THE ANEMOI CREW! Guqqie, Sniff, Aimsey and Tubbo (and maybe more shhhh don't tell anyone), they're my favourites, very found family coded. And finally two people with a normal childhood so I can have them make normal person references, these two fuckers get all of my interests (wait until they start talking about critical role THEN YOU'LL BE SORRY)

The Adventures of Wilbur and Raspberry-Stealer

Chapter Summary

Wilbur turns back around to his punnet of raspberries.

There is a cat.

There is a cat sitting on the bench eating the last of his raspberries.

“What the fuck?” Wilbur says, “Get out.”

or, instead of the power of found family making him less mentally ill. wilbur gets a cat. and maybe. just maybe. tommy agrees he should probably go to therapy.

Chapter Notes

this chapter is dedicated to the two people who have defined who tinaaos!wilbur is, probably the most, and kinda made me fall in love with this complex, tragic character that tina!wilbur is. This one goes out to Apollo and Todo, you both know what you’ve done for me and this stupid character who now holds a little bit of my heart, so if you’re reading this, thanks. If you’re not, then that’s really funny and I can be sappy without you both knowing. Thanks for everything ya dinguses.

And we are going to meet the best character, Raspberry Soot.

I’d also recommend listening to Nine and Son (both by Sleeping at Last) as those are two songs I listened to on repeat while writing this chapter. They’re tina!wilbur’s songs

Warnings: mentions of panic attacks, medical things and mild injury, mentions of death, general tina!wilbur trauma

this is... one of the lightest chapters we’ve had in a while. and that’s with tommy having a proper breakdown at the end

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Wilbur is slightly embarrassed to be moving back in with his father at the age of twenty-five when he is perfectly capable of living by himself. He has the financial means, he has every means of living by himself apart from the fact that...

Walking isn't his strong suit at the moment.

Nor is like... moving too much, he can move, because he's in physio so they have some hope for him, but he can't really... climb stairs or be trusted to live by himself because the way the doctors are talking about him if he sneezes too hard he'll just fucking die.

That might be a bit dramatic.

But he's not fucking enthused about having to move back in with Phil. The options were: Techno or Phil. Phil has fewer stairs and a bigger house than Techno does. Also, Wilbur would rather eat a plastic bag than live with Techno.

So now he's living with Phil.

There's still bandages and ice packs that need to be applied and a shit tonne of painkillers most days, and doctor's instructions and checkups and everything but...

Wilbur is alive!

That was apparently looking a bit touch and go for a moment, and now Wilbur is alive which Wilbur has no choice but to count as a complete win. Dying is... not something he overly wants to have a repeat of.

So he's alive.

But living with Phil because he allegedly will just fucking die.

It's a whole thing.

The whole thing is that the doctors believe that Wilbur's heart could "give out on him at any moment" and that he's at "high risk of going into cardiac arrest", and he may have done that one more time before leaving the hospital. Along with the fact that— walking isn't really working for him at the moment.

He can still walk a bit.

Turns out that having your legs partially crushed by rubble— like the rest of you— means that walking is a bit tricky. Wilbur can hobble around, holding onto things. His arms aren't strong enough for crutches, and Phil's house is not wheelchair accessible. This means that Wilbur is in a weird limbo.

He can walk short distances, but it hurts a lot after not that long and his legs are incredibly shaky.

Wilbur grips Techno's arm even tighter as he takes a step forwards, both of his legs shaking more than he's used to. Techno has a hold of him too, partly because Wilbur collapsed about three steps ago.

Now Techno is half dragging him.

They finally reach the couch, and between the both of them, they manage to get Wilbur sitting down.

Techno collapses onto the couch next to him. "Feel bad for the poor bastards who had to teach me how to walk again."

"It's so weird being unable to use my legs," Wilbur says, "Well, I can— but not really."

Techno just gives him the flattest look he has ever given anyone. “Gee. I wonder what that’s like?” Then he takes off his prosthetic and drops it onto the floor.

All without breaking eye contact.

...

Fair.

“Okay, I forgot—”

“Okay, well I fucking didn’t,” Techno mutters, he sighs, “I’m trying to give you sympathy but you are talking to someone missing a whole leg.”

“Well— not a whole leg. You have above the knee. You’re missing like half a leg.”

“You’re about to be missing half a leg.”

“Can I please have some slight sympathy, both of my lungs collapsed, and the bone in my shoulder blades embedded itself way further into my flesh than it was supposed to. And my rib cage fucking shattered, and my femur on both legs, and I broke—”

“I know,” Techno groans, “You are a lot more tolerable when you have a ventilator shoved down your throat.”

“Love you too, Tech,” Wilbur mutters.

They’re quiet for a long moment.

Techno is watching him carefully, the way he has since Wilbur woke up and wasn't dead. There's concern in his eyes for sure, but it always seems like he's looking for something *more*.

Wilbur doesn't know how to interpret it.

Techno sighs, "Well, you can still kinda get around."

"You're avoiding something," Wilbur eventually decides on, and Techno just looks at him, narrowing his eyes slightly. "What aren't you telling me?"

Techno straightens up, something in his eyes settling, and Wilbur wants to grab his brother and start shaking the answers out of him. Because Techno is strong and determined and he knows what he's doing but he's also being shifty as fuck, and—

"I wish I was there," Techno says. His voice isn't quieter than usual, nothing in his expression or voice breaks, he just stares at Wilbur, his eyes still searching for something on Wilbur's face. "Tommy isn't trained how we are."

Wilbur tilts his head, "Okay— you're doing that thing where you speak riddles around me."

Techno sighs, "I'd like to think there would be a better outcome if— Tommy wasn't there. That sounded better in my head."

Wilbur winces slightly.

He knows what Techno means. Really, he does. Tommy isn't trained in the way heroes are— no matter what weird tricks he pulled out in the apartment, he's not trained to deal with stressful scenarios the same way Techno and Wilbur are. Wilbur's been taught since he was ten to prioritise, assess a situation, and the best outcomes, and not to act— too rashly.

They've all always been a bit bad at that part.

"Or... you could be the one in my situation," Wilbur gestures, "And I got out because of my powers. I'm older."

"That means nothing."

"It means I protect you, asshole," Wilbur bites back, "The same way I do Tommy, the same way you do Tommy. The same way I would with Daniel, the same way you would. The same way Phil does for us. I will protect you."

Techno glares at him, "If I was there—"

"Well, you weren't," Wilbur returns, more bite in his tone than he really means. "You weren't, and I'm the one hurt. And I don't want to swap this pain, you do. I don't. I'll be okay, Techno."

"You very nearly weren't."

"But I am!" Wilbur throws his head back against the couch in exasperation. "I'm alive now."

"Do you have any fucking idea what it's like?" Techno hisses, "I watched them do CPR, I watched them shock you back to life. I watched your heart stop, Wilbur. I—" Techno takes a deep breath, running his hands down his face.

Wilbur sighs, "No, and I'm not gonna pretend I know what it's like to watch someone I care about die. Because I don't. I know you do, and—"

Techno pauses, "I need you alive, Wilbur. I don't want to do this without you."

Wilbur looks at him for a long moment.

And, oh.

There's no word for the feeling that fills Wilbur's chest. It's a deep sort of ache, like pushing on an old bruise in the centre of his chest. A bruise that well—he literally has a bunch of bruises on his chest, but this is so different.

Techno's expression hasn't changed at all.

Wilbur looks at his brother for a few more seconds.

Then he starts crying uncontrollably.

It's not like there's a moment where he can try and stop himself, where he feels the pressure building up behind his eyes and a wobbly lip.

No. One second he's fine, and the next he is crying at an impressive velocity.

Techno jumps slightly, just as the noise of it, before realising what's happening. His expression softens slightly and he moves so that Wilbur can bury his head in Techno's shoulder as he just... cries.

Nothing very pretty or poetic about it, if Wilbur wasn't sobbing so hard his throat hurt, then maybe he'd figure out some nice metaphor to explain this. Right now? He's just crying, crying really hard.

And as always Techno just holds him.

He just... cries, sobs tearing at his throat.

Because *he almost fucking died* . And he doesn't know why he kept it together for everyone else, he doesn't know why he didn't have this breakdown in front of Phil, or how he kept it together for Quackity or Daniel or Tommy but—

He's never been able to keep it together in front of Techno.

Wilbur eventually manages to stop sobbing uncontrollably.

But he does need a tissue because of the sheer amount of snot. Which is not charming, but Techno doesn't hesitate to hand Wilbur the entire box.

Wilbur takes a deep breath. "I killed someone," he eventually says.

Whatever Techno thought he was going to say, it sure as fuck was not that. He stares at Wilbur with wide eyes.

"When— uh— someone was choking Tommy, and then Tommy went limp and I just... panicked."

Techno stares at him, "Oh," is all he manages.

"Am I going to jail?"

Techno stares at him for a few moments, "I don't— think so?"

“I ripped a fucking hole in a man’s stomach, Techno. That feels like a crime.”

“Do you regret it?”

Wilbur lets himself think about it.

One part of his brain *knows* that whoever that was had a family, had people who would be mourning them. Wilbur knows all of that, everyone was something to someone. He’s seen death— and the impacts of it.

But... it was someone trying to kill Tommy.

And Wilbur... he just can’t bring himself to regret it. He regrets that he didn’t think of something different sooner, he regrets that was the measure he had to resort to. But he doesn’t regret it, he’d do it again.

He barely feels bad about it.

His morals must be beyond fucked.

Wilbur shakes his head.

Techno sighs, “Elysium agent?”

Wilbur nods.

“Does anyone know it was you?”

Wilbur shrugs.

“It was basically in self-defence. I shouldn’t be indulging in murder but— it was Tommy,” he’s quiet for a long moment, “I think our family is a bit unhinged.”

“I’m inclined to believe you,” Wilbur murmurs.

They’re both quiet again, and Wilbur flops so he’s leaning against Techno.

“I get it,” Techno says.

And that seems like that’s all they need to say on that topic. Wilbur doesn’t *know* he’s killed someone, he just knows basic biology and he doesn’t know how someone survives a fucking hole in their stomach.

Techno of all people would get it, with fighting rings and his general super strength. And he does get it, and Wilbur relaxes slightly. He doesn’t know if Phil would get it— he’d like to hope that Phil got it but...

Wilbur sighs.

Techno knocks Wilbur in the side of the head, knocking on his head like a door.

Wilbur frowns as Techno keeps knocking on the side of his head.

“What?”

“Looking for brain cells in there,” Techno murmurs.

“You really are a little brother.”

“More mature than you.”

“I’m not the one knocking on your head.”

Techno frowns, before dropping his hand.

They’re both quiet for a long moment, neither of them quite willing to break the silence yet, so it stretches around them.

“I love you,” Wilbur says.

Techno just looks at him, he almost opens his mouth for what would certainly be a biting retort.

Wilbur knows, Techno never needs to say it. He knows.

“I’m concentrating,” Tubbo snaps for what seems like the fifth time in about six minutes.

Sniff and Guqqie seemingly do not give much of a shit about how he’s focusing on trying to chase down *their fucking goose chase*, but they’re instead enjoying one of Schlatt’s computers with an absurd amount of monitors.

Tubbo sighs, turning back towards his work.

Aimsey is out doing— probably more productive things than either Guqqie or Sniff, he likes both Guqqie and Sniff, but they're not doing a lot of carrying of this at the moment. Right now it's just Aimsey and Tubbo doing all the work.

Although it's only been two weeks since they decided to even start this.

They haven't made much progress, Tubbo will be completely honest.

Sniff, Aimsey and Guqqie have become frequent house guests in the Schlatt-Beloved-Underscore household, and Schlatt seemingly knows better than to ask too many questions. When he first brought them all over, Schlatt just raised an eyebrow.

It's gotten to the point where most of them sleep here most nights

He had looked at Aimsey for a few long moments, before sighing and turning back to put more baked potatoes on for everyone.

Now Tubbo is sitting, trying to get *any* information, right now he's just looking at all the public access records and there is a lot to get through, he half wants to ask Sniff and Guqqie to help him but he's too stubborn to do that.

Time passes, Guqqie and Sniff are loud but having fun and Tubbo just manages to tune them out.

"See ya," Sniff says, and Tubbo looks at the clock, *11pm* . Sure. They walk forwards, before grabbing Tubbo by the shoulders and ruffling his hair. Tubbo makes a noise of disagreement as he tries to fight his way out but—

Nothing.

It's a hug, almost.

"Aimsey will be here soon," Sniff says, still hugging onto Tubbo's shoulders, and Tubbo tries to force his shoulders to relax. He kind of fails. Sniff seems to realise that he's a tense person, and lets go of him. "Guqqie and I are gonna pass out in—"

"The guest bedrooms," Tubbo mutters, he looks over his shoulder at Guqqie, "Do not make Sniff watch Vine compilations until two in the morning."

"Someone has to educate them!" Guqqie throws their hands up in the air, "None of you know any pop culture references because you're all too fucking traumatised—" they gesture at Tubbo wildly. "If I said *look at all these chickens* ? What does that mean to you?"

"Nothing?" Tubbo says slowly.

"EXACTLY!" Guqqie yells, "It means nothing to any of you— apart from Aimsey but none of you are Aimsey."

Sniff argues something that Tubbo can't be bothered to hear, and listens to the idle of chatter that washes over him as Sniff and Guqqie argue the entire way down the hallway and then into one of the guest bedrooms.

It had been Ranboo's room.

Now it is Sniff's and Guqqie's room. Aimsey gets their own room, but it is quite small, and that meant Ranboo and Tubbo now have to share Tubbo's room. He's debating on kicking Ranboo out to bunk with Aimsey.

Or kicking himself out?

It seems like a flawed system because Guqqie, Sniff and Aimsey don't *actually* live here, so it makes sense for Ranboo and Tubbo to have their own space and the others could come and go as they pleased—

Still, the chattering of Guqqie and Sniff get quiet and Tubbo feels like his brain can now actually reset.

Tubbo gets to work, cracking his knuckles and starting to scroll for any public information that he can find on the hero committee in general. Aimsey has been tracking down a list of names for a while.

He sighs, and gets to work.

Tubbo's pretty sure a lot of time passes, he's never been good at tracking time once he got engrossed in something, and this is no exception.

Tubbo's losing his mind.

He means this super nicely.

There surely is a simple way through this that Tubbo's just missing. The goal was access to the restricted files, this in itself was not an easy task, but in case Aimsey and Sniff wanted to make it *too easy* they wanted William Nelson-Jones' files.

This is not something easy to do.

Tubbo runs a hand down his face, leaning his head against the desk.

He should move onto someone easier to find dirt on, he knows he should.

He's never been able to deny himself a challenge, however. And Tubbo picks up the pencil by his side again, spinning it in his hand in a movement which is far too showy and flashy for no reason.

He thinks Tommy taught him that, or Schlatt. He's an amalgamation of people who have taught him, it's hard to know where the lines stop and start.

Why is he even doing this?

He doesn't— he doesn't *need* the hero committee gone, he doesn't give a shit about any of this. He just wants to be safe— and he knows there are better ways to do that.

"I have the list," someone says and Tubbo jumps, whirling around in his seat.

It's Aimsey.

Aimsey has a certain look in their eyes as they walk forwards, Tubbo knows that look rather well. Determination, her mouth is set in a straight line, gaze unfaltering, not a single thing hesitating in her stance or walk.

The room is dark apart from the blue glow of the computer lighting everything, Guqqie and Sniff turned off the overhead light when they left. Meaning it's just Tubbo and the vague outline of Aimsey in the doorway, before they move forwards.

They drop the paper onto the desk next to Tubbo. "A list of every hero committee member— current ones only. Grabbed it off of Techno."

"Techno?" Tubbo asks, "Why'd he hand it over?"

"He's kinda out of it at the moment," Aimsey confesses, "I'm a little bit worried, but it'll be fine. He's just working on paperwork and stuff, so he has access to this stuff. Just asked for

the hero committee list and—”

Aimsey gestures at the paper on the desk.

Tubbo picks it up, sighing slightly.

He skims over most of the names, he doesn’t recognise any of them anyway—

Aiden Reeves.

Fucking— Aiden Reeves is on there.

Tubbo immediately feels the bile rise in his throat, and the pencil snaps in his hand. It falls into two pieces onto the table and Tubbo can barely think.

Oh.

Aimsey’s eyes widen, “Hey— hey what’s up?”

Tubbo stares down at the paper. “My birth name is Tobias Reeves.”

“That is an— odd name.”

“Your name is Aimsey Teese,” Tubbo bites back, “You know me as Tubbo Underscore, Tobias Reeves is completely normal.” He slides the paper back over to Aimsey, closing his eyes and taking a deep breath. “Aiden Reeves.”

“Oh. Oh *fuck* .” Aimsey picks up the paper and holds it close to his face, “Holy fuck—Tubbo!”

“Yes.”

“Your dad—”

“I know,” Tubbo bites back and watches Aimsey withdraw slightly. They don’t flinch, everyone knows they would barely have to try in a fight against Tubbo. “I know, I know— I know. Shit. I thought they were in England! Why aren’t they in England?”

“You’re English?”

“Kinda,” Tubbo says, he takes a deep breath. “All the *shit* he got away with.”

Aimsey looks at him for a long moment, before pulling out the other desk chair and facing him. She grabs the coffee off of the desk and holds it in his hands, looking at Tubbo for a long moment.

Tubbo gives a half smile.

“Talk about it.”

“Huh?”

“Talk about it,” Aimsey presses again. “Your family— your parents, you. I know nothing about you.”

“I know nothing about you.”

“My name is Aimsey Teese, my mum is a lawyer and my dad was never really in the picture. I’m an only child, I grew up in Logstedchire because Mum is a family court lawyer and that is where she wanted to work. I grew up wealthy considering the area, and went to Prime Technology and STEM School for a bit.”

“I go there.”

Aimsey just smiles widely.

“My first pet was a weasel named Sprinkles and he was a demon of an animal, and I loved him so much. I realised I liked girls when I watched BBC’s Merlin and saw Katie McGrath play Morgana, that did things. My favourite board game is— Scrabble or Boggle and I am very good at word games.”

Tubbo just looks at her.

Aimsey gives a gesture, “Your go.”

“My name is Tubbo Underscore... uh— can you just ask me questions? I feel like that’s easier.”

“What’s your favourite colour?”

“Yellow.”

“Why?”

“Sunflowers. And yellow is just an inherently happy colour. I also like green, but something about yellow is just— nice. It’s just nice, I don’t have a super deep reason for it, it’s just nice

to... uh, yeah, yellow.”

Aimsey hums thoughtfully. “Why don’t you go by Tobias Reeves?”

“Faked my death when I was like twelve— thirteen?”

Aimsey’s mouth falls open. “Uh, okay— sure. What’s your favourite food?”

Tubbo pauses for a moment, mind flashing through every meal he’s ever had (dramatic) but now that he’s put on the spot he can not remember something he’s eaten just about ever. Food from Ranboo, and—

For Tubbo’s seventeenth birthday, which feels like decades ago. Ranboo, Tommy and himself had shirked off all responsibilities and they had just...

Baked.

Baked shitty vanilla cupcakes out of a packet mix, and then iced them with the shitty packet stuff that had come in the box.

“Vanilla cupcakes,” Tubbo laughs, “My favourite food is vanilla cupcakes.”

“Good choice. What’s your favourite board game?”

“Twister, I know it’s not a board game but— yeah.”

Aimsey laughs, it lightens up their entire face and Tubbo can’t help but look back down at the floor. These people— Aimsey, they’re so different from Tommy and Ranboo, Tubbo both hates it and wants to cry and he wants to love them forever.

It feels like he's starting to belong here.

In an odd way.

It's terrifying, that this is starting to feel natural, Sniff and Guqqie and Aimsey being around. Tubbo holing himself up here with their chatter in the background. As they debate group names and symbols and things that don't even matter and—

Aimsey just smiles, "What... is your favourite video game?"

"Burnout Paradise— or the Simpson Hit and Run."

"Favourite animal?"

"Uh— Capybaras?"

Aimsey snorts at that, nodding a little bit. "One of your fears."

Tubbo sits up a little straighter, looking straight at Aimsey.

"It doesn't have to be major," Aimsey says softly and Tubbo lets himself relax at that a little bit, just a little— "I've always been... uneasy around birds."

"Birds?"

"I don't trust them," Aimsey shudders slightly, "Like— if the birds teamed up against us, they could annihilate us, that's terrifying. Plus their beady little eyes—" she shudders again

and Tubbo just watches her with mild amusement.

He thinks for a moment, “Loud noises... that might be a bit too deep, but I don’t really like loud noises. I think that’s standard for most people in L’Manberg though.”

Aimsey gives him a sad smile, “Favourite song?”

“Right now? Anything Hometown.”

“A man of culture, I see,” Aimsey stands up at this, giving a low, mocking bow, their voice has taken on almost a painfully posh British accent and Tubbo just rolls his eyes at them. “I suppose you are fond of the theatre, Mister Underscore.”

They don’t drop the fake posh British accent, which sounds far more like Tubbo than he’d care to admit, and he just shoots Aimsey a look.

“I am rather fond of the theatre,” he also does the same, exaggerating his own accent to— not that much difference, he sounds quite a bit like his father, and he almost lets himself laugh at the irony of that. There’s something almost reclaiming about mocking himself when he sounds like his father.

Aiden Reeves.

Member of the hero committee.

Something he wants to unpack so incredibly badly, but he doesn’t even know how to start. How *does* someone start unpacking something like that, Tubbo knew his father was a horrible man but this is—

It’s impersonal, this time, the concept of the hero committee is corrupt and Tubbo knows that. He also knows his father was— is an awful, awful man who trained a child spy and didn’t

care what it took to get that.

That's personal.

The impersonal and personal are combining and making Tubbo's chest hurt just a little bit.

"Tubbo?" Aimsey's voice is gentle, he's holding onto Tubbo's wrist, not with a painful amount of force, but enough that there's pressure, and Tubbo is aware of it. He looks down at Aimsey holding his wrist.

Then he looks back up at Aimsey.

Xe seems concerned, her face twisting into something of— just confusion.

"Are you alright?"

"Just— get lost in my thoughts sometimes," Tubbo tries to laugh but it comes out stilted, he moves his hand slightly and Aimsey's grip immediately drops. "Just—" he pulls out the list of names again.

He takes a deep breath, crossing his arms slightly.

"William Nelson-Jones, Helen Davies, Lynelle Archer, Harry Laurier, Annette Kingstone, Jason Zhao, Fred O'Hara—" he hesitates over the last name, "Aiden Reeves. We need them all gone."

Aimsey nods solemnly, "We do."

"Whether through death or blackmail."

“Yes.”

Tubbo looks back down at the names, eight names, eight people who were fucking up countless numbers of lives. Eight people who would have corruption in their fucking bones, let alone for tracks for Tubbo to find. He—

Just stares.

Stares at all of it, the names and the power that the four of them— this little ragtag group are hoping to hold in their own hands. The power to— topple this thing, if only for a time, if only for a warning.

Tubbo looks up at Aimsey again, “That’s our plan. Blackmail. Reveal it.”

Aimsey nods. “We might die because of this, you might die because of this, Tubbo. I don’t think they’re above killing people to keep themselves safe.”

“Our plan is to reveal everything they’ve done?” Tubbo repeats, his voice feels so small, “We’re going to— reveal them to the world? Find the stuff that no one else can find, show it — and hope that’s enough.”

“Yup.”

“What if it’s not?”

“Then someone would have tried,” Aimsey looks down at their hands and then back up at Tubbo. “Someone would have tried— I would rather know we tried. I know we can’t be the first to try this, I hope we’re the last— but we might not be.”

Tubbo doesn't nod, he doesn't do much more than stare at the paper in front of him.

"Why are we doing this?" Tubbo eventually says, "Why am I doing this—"

"I don't know," Aimsey doesn't reach out to grab him, but it looks like they hesitate for a moment before drawing their hand back by their side. "I don't know," he says again, "Only you can tell yourself that, Tubbo. You don't have a stake in this like Sniff and I."

And Tubbo tries to think about it.

Why is he doing this? Is it because he is more and more convinced that he will follow these chucklefucks into the depths of whatever they want because they've shown him the slightest of kindness? Is it to attempt and protect himself from Elysium, or protect Tommy from the heroes or try and protect Logstedchire or—

Is he doing it because it's the right thing?

Is it really that simple?

Is anything with Tubbo that simple? He doesn't do things because it's the right thing, he just does them because he wants to survive. He doesn't want to leave the world better than he found it, he wants to leave it with himself in one piece.

He looks up at Aimsey, before looking away and managing to meet his eyes again.

"I don't know," Tubbo eventually whispers, and the quiet of the early morning seems suffocating around them. "I don't know why I'm doing this. I don't—I have no reason to be this loyal to you, I had no personal stake in this... I don't... know."

Aimsey gives him a sad smile, "Alright."

“I want to help,” Tubbo says, “I don’t care if it gets me killed.”

“Care,” Aimsey replies, something taut in her tone. “No one likes a martyr.”

Tubbo huffs.

“I’m not saying that as a joke,” Aimsey says, leaning forwards, “You live. Tubbo. Alright? No one gets left behind here, you are part of this. We don’t need you to die for this cause, we need you to live.”

Tubbo nods.

“Your life is more than a bargaining chip,” Aimsey says again. They sound so sure of themselves, and Tubbo knows in his heart that he would trust Aimsey to lead him into a volcano and they’d all make it out alive. Tubbo knows there’s something about the way that Aimsey holds herself that he’ll always trust.

They barely know each other, but Tubbo does know he trusts Aimsey Teese— and he’s pretty sure Aimsey Teese trusts him too.

“I can’t promise you’ll make it out alive,” Aimsey says, “I hope we all will... more than anything. But...” Aimsey glances over his shoulder, before leaning forwards again, looking Tubbo in the eye. “You. Abandon us if things go badly— run, Sniff and I can handle ourselves, Guqqie isn’t a citizen of L’Manberg. If things get messy, you run.”

“I’m not—”

“You run. Tubbo.” Aimsey has a distant look in stars eye, “You grab the people who are important to you, and you run. No being a hero— none of that, not for you. You’re here to hack. Do whatever it takes to keep yourself alive.”

And for all Tubbo knows he trusts Aimsey...

He wishes he could, he really wishes he could agree to what she was saying. It makes sense. It makes *so much sense*, Tubbo has the best shot of getting out if things go badly— but he doesn't want to.

He knows he can't leave these people behind.

Like how he thinks they wouldn't leave him behind.

"I can't promise that, Aimsey," Tubbo says as gently as he can. It's not as gentle as he'd like, Tubbo's never been particularly gentle and he attempts to not care about it— he cares about it however, he cares about it so much. "I can't— do that."

Aimsey takes a deep breath, leaning back in his chair and sighing. They close their eyes and sigh. "Okay," they say, "Don't be stupid with your life Tubbo, or I'll kill you."

"Same applies," Tubbo says.

They just stare at each other for a moment.

"Shake on it," Aimsey eventually says, holding their hand out in front of them. "Promise that we won't be stupid with our lives."

Tubbo hesitates for a few moments, before turning to face Aimsey and shaking his hand.

They're quiet for a long moment.

And Tubbo resolves to make this worth it, he resolves to make the work and care that Sniff, Guqqie and particularly Aimsey are providing him worth it. He doesn't know how to... easily show that he cares about them, but he does know what they need, and he knows that he's going to achieve it.

He's going to make the burden of himself worth it.

Aimsey then stands up, brushing their hands on their pants and looking at Tubbo for a long moment, before sighing. "Okay," she says, "I'm going to go crash in the guest bedroom. If that's alright?"

"You can take mine if you want," Tubbo says, gesturing with one hand at the computer, "I'll be busy."

Aimsey pauses for a few moments, "Tubbo—"

Tubbo waves a hand, "It's fine, I wouldn't be able to sleep anyway."

If Aimsey knows it's a lie then he doesn't say anything, only nodding slowly before leaving.

And Tubbo gets to work, he does a basic Google of all the hero committee members (apart from Aiden Reeves. He already has the information that could take him down overnight, and he doesn't know why he hesitates on it.)

Tubbo falls asleep at the computer, it's been a long time since he's done that. In the morning there's a blanket wrapped around his shoulders and a pillow on the desk, where Tubbo assumes his head was laying.

His neck hurts, and he leans back, stretching.

Alright. He needs coffee.

Tubbo gets out of the desk chair and scrambles towards the kitchen to make the strongest coffee he legally can. Because— of course, Tubbo has a caffeine addiction, it seems important to be any child genius.

Well, he's not a child genius, but it sounds better than saying *'he's a child who got really excited about computers and obsessed with them and also is naturally freakishly good at maths'*. Child genius works.

He makes his way into the kitchen, walking like a zombie towards the coffee maker—

On the bench is a tupperware container, Tubbo pauses— no one has been cooking as far as Tubbo's aware, and Schlatt is pretty good at putting anything in the fridge.

Tubbo opens the lid of the container.

It has twelve vanilla cupcakes.

All have yellow icing and rainbow sprinkles over the top of them.

Tubbo stares at it for a long moment, his brain unable to even fathom what to do from here because... Aimsey didn't only *listen* but xe got all of this, made all of this— for him, and Tubbo wants to cry.

Just a little.

In a good way.

Hi Tobes, hoping this is good. Ranboo (he's really nice by the way) and I made them, hope they're good (I think they might be a bit dry but don't tell me that I'll be sad if you tell me

that.) Take some breaks, Rome wasn't built or toppled in a day.

1. you got this, we don't know each other well yet, but you are a competent and smart person. we will get them. that's a promise from zephyrus (that's me in case you forgot), since I guess I'm the de facto leader of our little crew.

pps. TAKE BREAKS you're no good to anyone exhausted

Tubbo holds a cupcake in his hand.

They're yellow, vanilla cupcakes.

It means more than Aimsey could ever say to him, means more than she probably even knows. Tubbo just holds the cupcake in his palm, staring at it.

He grabs the entire container off the counter, turns around and walks back towards the room he's holed himself in. He holds the container against his side, and he doesn't feel as alone as he sits down, cracking his knuckles.

He has a hero committee to overthrow.

Well— attempt to.

Tubbo sighs once again— alright. He now has names.

Now it's time to look into them.

The next few days— almost a week— are confusing for Wilbur.

Real confusing.

Phil, Techno and Tommy are barely around, when they are around Techno has his nose in a book of some sort and Phil looks too tired to do much more than collapse onto the couch and immediately start having a nap.

When Tommy comes over, twice, he is hunched over papers with Techno, they're discussing something in low and furious tones.

So... Wilbur's kinda alone.

This defeats the whole purpose of why he's at Phil's house, he's at Phil's house because the doctors don't want Wilbur to be alone because his heart could fucking explode, or he could collapse. He might as well be in an apartment.

The others are working a bunch, Phil sometimes gives him half-hearted updates and Techno and Tommy are too involved in *whatever* they're doing to give Wilbur much attention. Wilbur is alive and breathing, but sometimes it feels like he's been buried in the ground and is a ghost haunting Phil's house.

Wilbur kind of feels like a ghost walking around in the empty house, he eats and watches a bunch of shitty TV shows, and he tries not to cry most days. He practices walking and moving his arms, and one time he actually manages to have a decent go beating the shit out of the punching bag hanging in Phil's garage and only hurts himself a little bit.

He's missed beating things up.

But then the next day he's pulled a muscle which makes breathing hurt, so Wilbur figures maybe he'll... leave beating up punching bags for the next little while.

The house stays clean, Wilbur loses his mind a little bit.

It's a long week.

Eventually, on the tenth day of him being out of the hospital he thinks something snaps because he tries to stub his toe just to see if it's something he's capable of doing. Which it is not. Then he decides that he misses people a lot.

Wilbur didn't know he was an extrovert until now.

He misses people.

It starts raining, and that's a fun break from monotony, so Wilbur watches the rain a bit, he opens the sliding door because it's warm inside and the air outside is refreshing.

He starts getting things to eat.

A punnet of raspberries, stuff for a sandwich, apple juice, because he deserves it.

He eats about half of the punnet of raspberries while watching the rain, then turns around to try and assemble a passable sandwich.

Successfully, he makes a sandwich, cutting it in half (triangles, the only way to do it.)

Wilbur turns back around to his punnet of raspberries.

There is a cat.

There is a cat sitting on the bench eating the last of his raspberries.

Wilbur holds onto the wall because his legs have started shaking and there is a very good chance that they will give out on him. And he wants to have the slightest amount of dignity when he falls.

But there is a cat eating his raspberries.

Can cats even eat raspberries?

He stares at the cat.

It's a kitten, a very tiny and small cat. Completely black apart from the white on her legs which makes it look like she's wearing some comfy socks. Or shoes— or whatever cats look like they're wearing.

Wilbur doesn't fucking know.

But there is a black kitten eating the remainder of his raspberries.

“What the fuck?” Wilbur says, “Get out.”

The kitten looks at him.

Tilts its head.

“Those are mine you little shit,” Wilbur says.

The cat jumps off the bench, before walking towards Wilbur. The cat pauses at his foot, before... paw swiping at his foot.

Wilbur just stares. “You just ate my only food of the day, what else do you want?”

The cat hits him in the foot again.

She’s so small.

“Do you want more food? I don’t have things cats eat— what do cats eat? Ma’am, I am unable to provide you with food that cats eat— can you eat bread? I have bread?”

The cat just stares up at him.

“Alright, Raspberry-Stealer,” Wilbur almost coos, and he crouches down to look at her better. “Why are you here? Do you need food?”

She’s damp, and Wilbur is pretty sure she just came inside from the rain, Wilbur has no idea where she came from before that. But she’s very small, and very cute, she headbutts Wilbur’s outstretched hand and Wilbur coos.

“Hello,” he whispers, unable to keep the fondness out of his voice, “My name is Wilbur. Where is your mum?”

He gets another headbutt in response.

“Honey,” Wilbur says, “You can’t stay here— my dad has a very no-pets policy in here, or else Techno would have gotten a million dogs before he turned sixteen. We need to find your mum.”

Raspberry-Stealer, which is what Wilbur will call her now just tries to nip at his hand.

“Fine,” Wilbur says, “I’ll find you some food, but *then* you have to leave.”

Wilbur walks back over to the fridge, rifling around for anything that he can find, tragically, he can’t find much and he hums as he looks through everything.

Then he brings up his phone, looking for things cats can actually eat. “Google says that you can eat cooked fish— don’t you eat raw fish in the wild? Why do I have to cook it for you? I think you’re a little bit spoiled.”

He turns around to look at Raspberry-Stealer.

She’s so cute.

She’s... so, so, so cute.

Wilbur almost wants to start crying because of how cute she is.

She’s up on the bench again, this time she’s rolling an apple around the table like a ball. Wilbur wants to hug her, and also cry because *awww*.

“You’re gonna be so spoiled. Okay, you can eat egg— that’s fun! You can have a little bit of banana— not too much, alright, gotta promise me you won’t eat too much banana. That’s a treat food...”

Wilbur scrolls through the list a little bit more. “Chicken. You can eat chicken, oatmeal, pumpkin... I’ll make you some chicken. Does that sound good?”

Raspberry-Stealer does not seem to mind any, she's focused on trying to roll the apple off the edge of the bench.

Wilbur snorts, and starts cooking chicken.

Honestly... he has no idea why he's taking better care of a cat than himself, Wilbur would not have the effort to make chicken for himself, but Google says she can't eat *too* much chicken, and there's a lot here...

Maybe Wilbur will make himself a wrap or something as well.

He cooks the chicken.

About halfway through, Raspberry-Stealer knocks the apple off the counter and she mews so pathetically that Wilbur almost bursts out crying again. He turns around to look at his little raspberry thief.

She's peering over the edge of the counter, staring at the apple below.

She sees Wilbur looking at her and mews again.

"Ma'am," Wilbur says, "You put the apple there."

He gets hissed at for that.

"I'll get you the apple, but you have to promise not to knock it off again, okay?"

He picks the apple off the floor.

It's moderately quiet for about a minute.

Then the thump of an apple on the floor and Raspberry-Stealer starts dramatically meowing, Wilbur tries to ignore it— he's heard there's a thing where you're supposed to let babies cry.

He manages to last about ten seconds.

Sure enough, he picks up the apple, placing it back on the paper.

Raspberry-Stealer makes a noise which Wilbur thinks is a happy noise.

Wilbur then picks up Raspberry who makes a noise and tries to make herself as difficult to carry as possible. She's too small for it to bother Wilbur at all, and Wilbur places her in the kitchen sink, with the apple.

She looks up at him curiously, before frowning at the few drops of water still on the bottom of the sink.

Wilbur then also places the apple in the sink.

That keeps her occupied while Wilbur finishes cooking the chicken.

He gives her what he thinks is a decent, non-dangerous amount, then looks at the rest of the chicken he's cooked. It's... a lot more than it probably should be, Wilbur knows they have some wraps.

He could have a chicken and salad wrap situation— they have lettuce and some carrot, it'll be a very, very, *very* sad salad...

But he's hungry as fuck and can't be bothered to wait much longer.

Raspberry eats the chicken quietly, glancing up at Wilbur every few moments as Wilbur eats the wrap he's assembled. It looks like she's going to pester him for his wrap, but she doesn't, and they eat in silence.

When Raspberry finishes the chicken she makes a small noise.

Wilbur looks up from his wrap.

She then jumps off the counter, landing on the floor and skittering towards the front door.

"Oh," Wilbur says quietly, looking at Raspberry-Stealer standing in front of the door. She looks at him, tilting her head a little bit, "See you later?"

In response he gets a meow which sounds vaguely offended.

And she darts off into the night, out the open door.

Wilbur sits there, before turning back to the extra chicken he made— he could probably make this into some sort of pasta situation— if not then he'd figure it out then. He pauses for a few moments.

Is a cat really going to be the thing that makes him take care of himself?

Wilbur makes pasta, and tries not to think about it too much.

The next day is almost peaceful.

Wilbur lives his best life, reading a book, scrolling on YouTube for an offensive amount of time and then scrolling through countless theories about what happened to Theseus and why he fell off the face of the Earth. (Wilbur doesn't care about Theseus, duh, not after everything — he just wants to make sure Theseus isn't a threat anymore... yeah, that's all.)

It's peaceful.

The day outside is nice, and Wilbur spends some time outside.

He goes to make himself some lunch when—

There's a clatter at the front door, some muffled swearing and the noise of someone hitting their foot into the wall.

Wilbur snorts, if the person at his door is *supposed* to be a threat, then they're not a very effective one. But Wilbur's pretty sure he knows who it is.

“Knock, knock, bitch,” Wilbur hears a voice at the front door and spins his body around. It hurts a bit, and Wilbur winces— he forgot that bending his torso even slightly made it feel like his ribs were going to pop.

The door slides open and in walks Daniel Greyson, the man himself.

Wilbur stares at him. “Huh?”

Daniel walks in like nothing happened like this is a common thing that happens every day and drops a bunch of stuff on the kitchen counter. “You have paperwork! Quackity told me to

bring you this.”

“Could Quackity not have... come and visit?” Wilbur asks, “I miss my boy.”

Daniel rolls his eyes, taking the first stack of paperwork out of the bag. “Also, the other option was Tommy and he’s gonna get you to try and do an interview.”

“What?”

“Yeah,” Daniel takes another stack of paper out of the bag and *how much is there?* He also takes out a bag of chips which makes it slightly better. “He’s been gunning for it for a while, but doesn’t know how to bring it up to you. He wants you to... be alive on social media or something. I dunno, that isn’t my domain, it’s like the Fundy thing all over again. He’s kinda gunning this one though because for some reason everyone thinks he’s qualified— which is just a blatant lie.”

Wilbur stares at Daniel for a few moments, “How are you the one everyone thinks is emotionless?”

“Oh, I have a lot of opinions and not a lot of time,” Daniel says, “Do you know— what’s her name, Elizabeth, she’s part of the PR team. Tommy hates her, I think she’s amazing. Basically, her deal is that she has a degree in communication and PR and—”

Wilbur stares at Daniel for a few moments. “Do you know all the gossip?”

“Of fucking course I do,” Daniel says, he almost seems offended for a moment, “Who do you think I am?”

Wilbur just stares at him.

“Anyway,” Daniel says, he picks up the stack of paper and a pen before walking towards Wilbur.

He drops the paper and pen on the couch next to Wilbur.

“So— this is about a report regarding what happened— you just have to sign at the end. Put your last name and first name and signature. You can read through it or have me give you the summary.”

“Who wrote up the report?”

“Tommy, largely,” Daniel replies, “Him and Techno have been obsessing over it, I think this is easier than dealing with anything else. It’s like sixty pages long with multiple first-hand accounts, and this is just the draft stage.”

“What’s this... for?” Wilbur asks slowly.

“Reports on the tower and the apartment attack,” Daniel says, sorting through more papers, “Just general Elysium moves— they’re pretty determined to get all the information out and try to make some arrests. Showing actions that they can do— for example, they want heroes’ residences to have slightly more safety, and the security at the tower to be overhauled, Kristin agrees with that by the way—”

“It’s just a report?”

“With recommendations, first-hand accounts, a bunch of other stuff. Basically, they’re trying to get all the information they can and then hand it off to someone else.”

Wilbur frowns, picking up the stack of paper, “Do they want me to give my account?”

“Oh, for sure,” Daniel puts more stuff down, turning around and going back towards the kitchen counter, “Neither of them are going to ask you though, I’m asking on behalf of them. They dunno I’m asking though.”

“Oh.”

“Yup!” Daniel grabs the packet of chips off the table and starts going through the cupboards, probably for a bowl. “They’re on a rampage— but neither of them will ask you to give your account because they think it’ll bring up trauma.”

“A paperwork... rampage?” Wilbur repeats, as that’s way easier to focus on than the trauma part.

There’s something hilarious about Wilbur being able to see Tommy and Techno, two terrifying forces of nature taking all their frustration out on paperwork and reports and figuring out how to do this all.

He can almost imagine Techno and Tommy sitting down at a desk, with Techno swearing about how annoying this entire thing was. He smiles, before picking up the stack of paper and starting to flick through it.

“So why do they need my signature?” Wilbur asks, “And why are you here?”

Daniel pauses for a few moments, before seemingly finding a bowl in the kitchen and tipping the packet of chips into the bowl. Wilbur would have to wash that later. “Because, in their quest to avenge you everyone seemingly forgot that you’re alive.”

Wilbur pauses, “Huh.”

“They haven’t like— forgotten you,” Daniel walks into the room, placing the bowl of chips on the coffee table. He glances up at the show Wilbur’s watching before screwing up his nose, “You’re watching—”

“Yes, it’s a great show,” Wilbur reaches forwards for a chip.

They’re just plain chips, nothing but salt, but they’re also Wilbur’s favourite because textures bother him.

“Yeah so, they haven't forgotten about you,” Daniel also grabs a handful of chips before sitting on the floor, on the other side of the coffee table. “But— they’ve just all been busy, and you’ve been alone.”

Wilbur just watches him. “I guess?”

Daniel sighs, “Look, I was by myself for a fuckin’ long time. You don’t have to pretend you enjoy the silence, you’ve been surrounded by people your entire life, and now you’re bein’ left alone. So that means you’re stuck with me.”

“I can think of worse people to be stuck with,” Wilbur deadpans.

“I’m gonna make you regret saying that,” Daniel says, he flops on the couch next to Wilbur and the both of them are quiet for a long moment.

Wilbur glances at Daniel who is now watching the show on the TV, his arms crossed and he looks rather unimpressed about the entire affair. Wilbur watches him for a few moments, Daniel feels like a version of himself that never really learnt how to express emotions, while Wilbur has every emotion all the time and needs the entire world to know about it, Daniel seems like the opposite of it.

He tries to remember when he was a kid, he was colder, especially when he first met Phil, he’s not like that anymore, but he used to be. And he thinks... he thinks Daniel is worried about him, Wilbur doesn’t know that for sure, of course, but it’s the thing that makes sense.

Daniel is sitting with his arms crossed, there's a furrow in his brow as he glares at the TV like it's wronged him, he glances over at Wilbur every few seconds, eyes scanning for any injuries in a way that Wilbur is used to getting from Techno.

Yeah.

He's worried.

"I'm okay," Wilbur says, and Daniel's eyes snap to him. "I'm okay... stop looking at me like I'm dead."

Daniel rolls his eyes, "I'm not."

"You are," Wilbur responds, with a gentleness that actually shocks him, "I'm okay, you really don't need to worry about me. Everyone else is worrying me enough for... well, everyone. I'm okay."

Daniel shakes his head, he looks back at the TV, not taking his eyes off of it, "You're not. And— everyone's just— forgotten that you're alive and breathing and shouldn't be left alone right now. Tommy tends to be... dense."

"Dense?" Wilbur repeats with amusement.

"Dense to other people," Daniel's eyes are boring into the TV at this point, and Wilbur genuinely believes that if looks could kill, the TV would be broken right about now. There's something almost dangerous in Daniel's eyes, "He's bad at recognising when something's wrong with someone else."

Wilbur pauses for a few seconds.

Why is Daniel bringing this up?

Is Daniel... okay?

Wilbur knows a bit about cries for help and trying to hide them behind other things, and this sounds like something he would've said in his childhood.

"Are you... okay?" Wilbur asks and Daniel just looks down again, "What isn't Tommy seeing?"

Daniel snorts, "Anything... he's... not seeing anything, I'm just me. I'm just the best friend and I have my shit together, and my only role is to keep both of us alive because Tommy doesn't have any preservation skills. And—"

"Oh dear," Wilbur says, "Ah. Okay."

"Y'know I was sneaking out several nights in a row," Daniel says quietly, looking up at the ceiling, "And— he didn't notice. And that's *fine* I don't fucking want him to notice, I don't want him to notice. This is a dumb thing to be upset about."

"Doesn't matter if it's a smart or dumb thing to be upset over, you're still upset, that's the part that matters. Tommy—"

—Is a lot of things, he's one of Wilbur's favourite people, he's fiercely loyal, has a shady past and is a bit terrifying sometimes. But he's smart, and most of the time he's just aware, and he holds this weight to him that he shouldn't. He's alive and vibrant but only sometimes, and Wilbur knows that Tommy has many flaws.

But those flaws are a part of Tommy, the brashness, the inability to back down, the lack of self-preservation. A mess of all of these things make Tommy, Tommy, and to say that Wilbur loves him "in spite" of Tommy's flaws is just— wrong. He loves Tommy partly because of those flaws, the same way he loves Techno because of his flaws and the same way he loves

Phil because of his flaws. And Quackity and Shubble and everyone who has ever meant anything to Wilbur.

“—Has a lot going on, I think,” Wilbur eventually decides, it’s easier than saying anything else. “I don’t know half of it but—”

Daniel nods, he sighs. “Whatever, I’m fine.”

Wilbur frowns.

“Just know I care,” Wilbur says, and Daniel’s eyes widen slightly, “I care about you, don’t forget it.”

“I don’t care about you.”

Wilbur knows that’s a lie, he knows it in the way that Daniel is leaning towards him slightly, and he keeps scanning Wilbur for any injuries. He knows Daniel cares, he doesn’t need to say it because Wilbur knows.

“Okay,” Wilbur responds, “Sure. That’s why you’re here.”

Daniel throws a pen at him, “Just sign the damn paperwork.”

And over the next few days, Daniel is the one that Wilbur sees the most out of his entire family.

Techno and Tommy are still on their rampage and Phil has a lot of cleanup to do, both socially and by sorting out the heroes' tower, which has— a giant hole in the tower.

It's weird that Wilbur's been largely left alone.

But Daniel makes for hilarious company.

"I could totally take Techno in a fight," spoke through a mouthful of chips.

Wilbur had started laughing even harder.

Or something more like, "Purpled is such a dumb fucking name for a vigilante." Wilbur had furiously agreed with that idea. Who named themselves *Purpled*, there was Theseus, Aurelian, Slime and then... Purpled.

One of those names clearly did not fit, and Wilbur was glad someone finally agreed with him about it.

Wilbur is sitting on the couch when he hears a familiar noise.

Daniel is staying over, he's decided he's staying the night, as Phil is working all night. He is sitting on the couch, legs crossed underneath him, he is staring at the TV with fury in his eyes as he tries to beat this level of the game.

"Stupid fucking game!" Daniel yells, about three moments away from throwing the controller at the TV. "Stupid— fucking, I hate this level. Wilbur, can you do this level for me?"

"You can do this level," Wilbur adds absent-mindedly, he turns around to look at the large sliding door, "I believe in you."

"Do the level for me, or I'll tell Quackity you hate him."

“Quackity knows I don’t hate him, Daniel, could you go look outside?”

“Can’t you?”

“I literally can not,” Wilbur says, “Remember— legs are still attempting to work?”

Daniel sighs dramatically and gets up, pausing the game and muttering slightly more underneath his breath.

He walks behind the couch, then stops.

“That’s a cat.”

“Yeah, that’s Raspberry-Stealer. She stole my raspberries, let her in.”

“Raspberry the cat?” Daniel repeats slowly.

“Raspberry-Stealer, the full name is important.”

“Her name is Raspberry,” Daniel slides the door open and a rush of warm night air floods into the living area. Wilbur watches as Daniel crouches down, holding out his hands in front of him towards Miss Raspberry-Stealer. “Hi.”

Daniel’s voice does not change at all when he’s talking to Raspberry, which is funny considering how high-pitched Wilbur goes to talk to her.

“Wilbur wants to see you— I think, so come here.”

A few moments later, Daniel walked around the couch and placed Raspberry on Wilbur's leg, looking at her, then up at him, then sitting down next to Wilbur and continuing his game.

Raspberry is just looking at Daniel, Wilbur scratches her underneath the chin, the way that Techno does with Floof, and Raspberry leans into it. He'll have to Google why later. But it's peaceful.

Daniel glances at Raspberry, then at Wilbur.

"Cute cat."

"Thanks," Wilbur deadpans.

Daniel rolls his eyes, "Okay then, not a cute cat."

"I will stomp you."

"You breathe too hard and your chest hurts," Daniel says with an impressive amount of ease, he barely looks away from his game, while comboing someone into another dimension. "I'd love to see you try to take me in a fight."

There's a moment of quiet.

Raspberry jumps off of Wilbur before landing on Daniel's lap and curling onto his leg. Daniel glances down at the small cat on his lap.

"Hey," Daniel says, "My name is Daniel Greyson, you're Raspberry-Stealer but you don't know that because you're a cat, and right now I'm comboing the fuck out of this motherfucker—"

“Don’t swear in front of the child!”

“The child can handle it,” Daniel snaps back, “I’ll teach you how to swear— don’t worry kiddo.”

“Why are you caring more for the cat than you are human people?”

“I’m not gonna be mean to a cat!” Daniel responds, as he throws the character off the stage and his smile flickers to be a bit wider. “Raspberry did nothing, humans did something— you did something.”

“Oh yeah, what did I do?”

“Y’know...” Daniel responds with nothing else but a knowing smile and a... almost dangerous look towards Wilbur.

Wilbur runs through everything he’s said out loud in the past year of his life— he doesn’t *think* any of it is bad. It might be? Wilbur doesn’t have a fucking clue, he can’t remember half his life let alone if he said anything that would be deserving of Daniel’s wrath.

Probably.

He probably said something, and it’s probably deserved.

He just shoots Daniel a wide grin back.

Daniel rolls his eyes, “You were a lot more fun to tease before you became self-aware.”

“I was also more of an ass though,” Wilbur watches as Raspberry clambers off of Daniel and finds her way back towards Wilbur.

“Yeah...” Daniel says, he glances away from his game for a half-second, before his eyes flicker back to the screen, “I like you more this way.”

Me too. Wilbur almost says.

Huh.

Okay.

Wilbur pets Raspberry again and smiles to himself.

And Wilbur’s monotony continues, it’s some of the most comfortable patterns he’s fallen into. He cooks and cleans and takes care of himself the best that he can. Sometimes he fucks it up, sometimes he doesn’t.

It’s better though.

He thinks.

He thinks he’s getting better— he’s not sure, he doesn’t remember a comparison to hold it against. But he feels healthier, he feels more alive and the most like... *himself* that he has since he was a kid.

It’s nice.

It’s really nice.

Wilbur's time is left mostly to himself and Raspberry. Raspberry ducks in and out every now and again, she does cute cat things, throws things off tables, and leaves before it gets too late.

Wilbur in the meantime gets better at being a responsible adult— he cooks for himself more than he has, perhaps ever in his adult life, and makes Phil's work lunches just because he's losing any sense of purpose holed up in this house. He reads more than he ever has in his adult life— he plays more video games and watches so much TV.

It's weird... Wilbur hasn't had this much free time since... ever.

When he was young he had school, then training, then work, and now he's left with— nothing, he's losing it a little. He's pretty sure he's forgotten how to talk to people.

Phil, Tommy and Techno are not constants, Daniel is the most constant out of the lot of them. He shows up, sometimes helps Wilbur cook, or clean, and does all the shit that no one else will do with him.

Wilbur's grateful for it, of course, but he won't tell Daniel because he'd rather die (again) than admit that to him.

So Wilbur's life becomes a comfortable constant.

The door slams open one day, and Wilbur, while not completely trained up again— has been walking without as much shakiness and knows what he's doing. He whirls around, kitchen knife in his hand and he throws it.

There's a screech, a thunk of a knife and another screech.

Oh.

That's Quackity and Shubble.

Wilbur peers down the hallway, still pulling another knife out from the block just in case— yes, it's not a good look— but he'd rather explain this than being stabbed in the back— or the front— or even in general.

He's recently experienced the whole almost dying thing— and Wilbur is in no hurry to deal with any of that again.

“What the fuck Wilbur?” Comes the familiar voice of Quackity, “You can't just chuck a knife at a guy— it's considered rude in most countries, also stop leaving the spare key underneath the cushion of the outside chair—”

“It's a good place to keep them,” Shubble adds absentmindedly.

She pushes into Phil's house like she's the one who owns it— which— Quackity and Shubble are probably the next people who have been here the most times, after himself and then Techno. Quackity had a bedroom here for a while, until Techno had annoyed him so hard that Quackity moved back with his parents.

They had a fun childhood.

The pair of them are in the kitchen before Wilbur can even think to say anything, and Quackity is immediately raiding the fridge, the way he has always done. Shubble sits down at the counter, before grabbing an apple.

“Did you really come just to raid my fridge?” Wilbur asks, “Because the tower has a whole canteen that you can steal from—”

“We wanted to see you,” Quackity closes the fridge, holding a tupperware container underneath his arm before looking around for forks. He finds one, before starting to eat the

pasta— which was supposed to be Wilbur’s lunch— directly out of the container. “It’s been a while.”

Wilbur nods, he grabs an apple out of the bowl too, munching into it, and chewing with his mouth open just to bother Shubble. Shubble throws a piece of— some food that should have been thrown out days ago that’s just on the counter.

“So,” Wilbur says slowly, he takes the pasta off of Quackity before putting it in the microwave— he will not let one of his best friends eat pasta straight out of the container, “How are the recruits?”

Shubble and Quackity exchange a glance.

“Eryn’s great,” Quackity says with a shrug, “I have no clue how to train his powers, but it is fun to train him— I hope we weren’t like them as recruits, they’re all so confused all the time — Eryn had to ask me how to punch someone.”

“Did you tell him?”

“Of course! I’m a good mentor,” Quackity says, “But— how do you not know that?”

“First time you tried to punch someone you had your thumb tucked in and broke your thumb,” Wilbur returns and that makes Shubble laugh. “Eryn seems to be doing well, considerin’ your past record.”

Quackity grins widely, just shrugging a shoulder.

The microwave dings and Quackity gets his pasta out of it, he then grabs two more forks and chucks them both in the tupperware container, Wilbur starts eating his pasta, leaving the apple a bit abandoned.

“And Sniff?” Wilbur asks, looking at Shubble, “Techno tells me more about her— but they’re doing well?”

“Very,” Shubble says, “Quiet most of the time— waiting for instructions. For some reason I thought they’d be like Techno, fighting authority at every turn, but no— he listens to everything and waits for orders.”

Wilbur takes a thoughtful bite of his pasta, “Techno just does his whole— thing to feel like he’s in control. Well, now he’s pretty much in control of every situation he’s in but— uh, yeah.”

Shubble nods, almost thoughtfully, before she goes back to eating her apple.

Wilbur whacks Quackity’s fork away and takes the fork-full of pasta that Quackity was going to take. Quackity just stares at him for a long moment, mouth slightly open.

“Yes?”

“Do you mind?”

“Not even slightly,” Wilbur replies, mouthful of pasta, he chews loudly for a few moments mostly to annoy Quackity, it works because Quackity screws up his face. “So— why are you actually here?”

“We’re your friends,” Shubble says, she sounds a little bit tired, and makes eye contact with Quackity in a way that implies that they have pre planned this conversation, and Wilbur curses himself for being so predictable. “How are you doing, Wilbur?”

“Oh,” Wilbur says, “Yeah— alright. I beat up a punching bag and could move around the next day— which is a pretty big change for me. Walking is— shaky, but I’m pretty okay.”

Quackity and Shubble exchange another glance.

Shubble leans forwards, “Wil, we’re worried about you—”

“Mentally,” Quackity finishes, “That sounds weird— does that sound weird?”

“A little,” Shubble says.

“You have a concerning track record at the best of times— and that’s before— all of this,” Quackity gestures around him.

“I’m actually okay,” Wilbur says, he keeps his voice mostly quiet, and takes another bite of the pasta, Quackity has stopped eating it, meaning Wilbur gets more pasta to himself— which is an excellent tradeoff, “I’ve been... taking care of myself better than usual, getting a normal amount of sleep— normal for a non-phantom hybrid. Eating, exercising— relaxing, it’s been nice. I genuinely think I’m doing better than Phil and Techno.”

Shubble leans forwards a little bit, taking another large crunch out of the apple. “If you want to talk about it, we are here for you—”

“I know,” Wilbur says, and he means it.

When did he start meaning it?

“I know,” Wilbur repeats again, the words feel right in his mouth.

Quackity and Shubble look at each other.

“Who the fuck are you and what have you done with Wilbur?” Quackity slams his fork onto the counter, “You’re like— confident? Is that the right word? Why are you being confident in yourself, this is weird— not that it’s not good— why are you— Shubble!”

“You are being odd,” Shubble says, narrowing her eyes at Wilbur.

Wilbur cackles, “You think I’m suspicious because I’m not being as mentally ill as normal?”

“THAT!” Quackity announces, pointing at Wilbur.

Shubble takes another bite out of her apple, “Well,” she says carefully, “If you are genuinely feeling better? Then that’s an amazing thing, I just need you to know that if you come to me there’s never any judgement.”

“There’s some judgement if you come to me—” Quackity cuts in, “Like that time you tried to eat an entire orange, we both know you’re allergic to—”

“I am not allergic to oranges, they just do that.”

“Make you break out in hives?”

“Yeah, that,” Wilbur retorts, angrily stabbing into the tupperware full of pasta and getting nothing on his fork. He sighs dramatically and goes for a second fork-stab, and he also fails that and gets no pasta on it.

Shubble snorts.

“Shut up,” Wilbur murmurs.

Shubble just laughs a little bit harder and Wilbur flips her off.

This time he manages to stab the pasta.

“I know though,” Wilbur says through a mouthful of pasta, which makes Quackity screw up his nose. “You two will only judge me about the stuff that doesn’t matter—”

“I’d say you eating oranges when you’re allergic to them matters—”

“I am not allergic to oranges!”

“You totally are!”

The argument lasts for another five minutes, and Shubble doesn’t intervene, only loudly chewing her apple as she watches Quackity and Wilbur argue with the ferocity of—something else, that’s for sure.

When Shubble finishes her apple, she throws it towards the bin and it lands in there perfectly. That stops the arguing for a moment as both Quackity and Wilbur are impressed with Shubble’s throw.

It’s a nice time, Wilbur hasn’t seen these two in a while, and they fall back into the natural banter, insulting and occasionally a supportive comment that he’s used to with these two. It almost feels like he isn’t even injured slightly, and he didn’t almost die not that long ago.

After about another hour of bullshittery, Shubble glances at her phone. Quackity is mid-way through telling a dramatic story about something Eryn did, and how Quackity got thrown onto his ass.

“Then, he just— punched me, straight up, in the nose!”

Wilbur cackles.

“Speaking of Eryn,” Shubble says, “He’s supposed to be going on patrol with you tonight.”

“Already?” Wilbur asks, glancing at Quackity, “It took me two years before I was allowed to —”

“Phil was protective of you, and you were also fourteen,” Shubble adds, “Eryn is seventeen — almost eighteen, and he’s only allowed to shadow and at the first sign of trouble he’s *supposed* to go back to the tower.”

Shubble gives Quackity a sharp look.

Ah, this is an argument they’ve had before then.

“What about a mugger— Eryn could totally handle a mugger.”

Shubble sighs, standing up and glancing at her phone again, “Not my issue, if Eryn gets stabbed you’re gonna be in a lot of trouble—” she looks at Wilbur, “We have to get ready for patrol— and get Eryn ready for patrol.”

“Fair enough,” Wilbur says.

“Well, in that case we’ll see ya soon,” Quackity promises with a nod of his head, “Has Daniel been—”

“Giving me copious amounts of paperwork for mission reports? Yes. Of course.”

“That’s my boy,” Quackity says, tapping Wilbur on the head, the same way someone might a large dog. Wilbur goes to open his mouth and instead of saying something remotely intelligent, Quackity hits him in the back of the head.

Wilbur yelps, because of course he does.

He has several stitches in the back of his head.

His head reels at the jostle— and he looks up to glare at Quackity, with as much rage as he can manage. “Quackity!”

“What?”

“I am still *healing*. I still have stitches in the back of my head— Shubble, if you don’t mind can you check if I’m bleeding out?”

There’s a quiet sigh, and Shubble stands up, walking behind Wilbur before looking at his hair, moving sections out of the way to the bit that’s shorn close to his head— it’s not the best look, he will be real.

“Nothin’,” Shubble says, “But we do have to go— or we’ll be late,” she leans down and hugs Wilbur around the shoulders, “See ya soon, Soot.”

After about another five minutes of saying goodbye and Quackity and Shubble being reluctant to leave. They do eventually leave, with Shubble being mildly stressed about being late,, Quackity and Shubble do eventually leave, Shubble stressing about how much time it is until the next patrol, and the pair of them rush out in the flurry they came in with.

Wilbur pauses for a few moments.

He turns around and goes back to his day.

The rest of the day is relatively calm, Wilbur eats the remaining pasta and then some more that he makes. He cleans his room and he punches a punching bag with much more success than last time. He watches some TV, sends Techno some amazing memes which he only gets a thumbs up for.

Memes are wasted on Techno.

It passes relatively calmly, and by seven Wilbur is curled up on the couch with a blanket around his shoulders, watching a movie that he's seen a million times, but it's a great movie

He hears a small noise.

Wilbur immediately picks up the pillow for defence, he's not sure what the pillow is going to do in a fight but the knife block is far away. He pauses for a few moments waiting for any noise.

He turns his head.

Standing at the door is a small black kitten, Wilbur smiles to himself, before getting up. His legs are shaking slightly as he approaches the door. She puts a paw against the door when she sees Wilbur.

Wilbur opens the door.

“Hello, Miss Raspberry.”

Raspberry meows at him in response.

Wilbur reaches down, picking up the small cat who looks up at him. Then he places her on his shoulder.

She seems to be a fan of this and makes a small noise. Her claws dig slightly into his shoulder and Wilbur just smiles. It doesn't hurt, he's wearing enough clothes that it doesn't hurt. A jacket over the top of his shirt, he can barely feel it.

“Well,” Wilbur says.

How does someone speak to an animal?

Techno speaks to Floof like a friend, but Floof is also Floof and Wilbur doesn't think most animals are like Floof.

“What brings you here?” Wilbur coos.

In response, Raspberry headbutts Wilbur's neck.

Wilbur laughs. “Interesting, interesting. I would feed you raspberries, but if you eat too many of them you'll get sick. Google says you can eat a little bit of cheese, or fish. So we're gonna try to feed you cheese. Isn't that fun? I will get cat food soon.”

Raspberry meows at him again.

It seems like fun.

“Now, Miss— Ma'am? I have no clue how to address you politely. Do I need to address you politely? I would like to address you politely— you're a cat, you don't care how I address you.”

Raspberry swats at his hair.

Her claws immediately get tangled and Wilbur sighs loudly.

With great difficulty Wilbur manages to get Raspberry's claws out of his hair. She seems pretty intent on holding on, but with patience, some light bribery and Wilbur's want to get claws out of his hair, he manages it.

He puts Raspberry on the counter, and then puts his hands on his hips, staring at him. "Miss Raspberry."

She doesn't even look guilty, the evil cat.

Wilbur can't keep the fondness out of his laugh and watches Raspberry move around the table, pawing at things and generally being a menace to fucking society. At some point she tries to whack Wilbur in the face.

Wilbur, well-versed in the art of dodging, dodges out of the way. He laughs before tapping his finger against the middle of Raspberry's forehead. "Got ya."

Raspberry mews at him.

Wilbur just shrugs, "Alright— what are we feeding you for dinner? I've already eaten, Phil will probably eat—"

At that time, the door swings open.

Phil is holding his bag, a very impressive bruise on the side of his head— among other things, there's a cut on his forehead, and he has a case full of various paperwork that Wilbur does not want to get into.

“What is that?” Phil asks.

Wilbur holds up Miss Raspberry who seems unimpressed with this. “This is Miss Raspberry-Stealer Soot.”

“That’s a cat.”

“Or that.”

“Why do you have a cat?” Phil asks, squinting slightly, “Did you steal the neighbour's cat—Wilbur—you’re not eleven anymore it’s not cute—”

“No, the neighbour’s cat is orange and hates pets. Trust me— I’ve tried.”

“Why do you have this cat?”

Wilbur shrugs, before holding Raspberry out to Phil, “I’m left alone a lot— I think she’s a stray. I couldn’t just turn her away, y’know? She’s only around sometimes but— I like having her around.”

Phil almost looks guilty for a moment, “I have something for you,” he says slowly, “And it’s not a cat.”

“Oh, damn,” Wilbur says, “But I’d much rather a cat—”

Phil drops his bag on the counter, before riffling around in his bag and pulling out a small box. He looks at Wilbur then at the box in his hand, “You lost the last one—”

Recognition immediately floods across Wilbur's face, he lost the SBI brooch when a building collapsed on top of him— which seems reasonable enough, Wilbur barely wore a brooch anyway, just— it meant a lot to him.

Phil drops the box on the table between Wilbur and himself.

Wilbur picks up the box, glancing at Phil before opening it.

It's a golden ring with a small emerald on it— well it might not be an emerald, knowing Phil it probably isn't. But it's a green stone of some kind, around the stone is a thin band of gold. He looks at it for a long moment.

Then he glances at the engraving on the inside of the ring.

7/4/2006

It's British dating rather than American— the 7th of April, 2006. Wilbur looks up at Phil, his mouth slightly open.

"The day I met you," Phil says easily, he looks down at the counter again, refusing to make eye contact with Wilbur.

"I know," Wilbur says, he turns the ring around in his hand, looking up at Phil and then looking back down at it. "I— Phil."

"It's one of the most important days of my life," Phil says, "And I know it is for you too—"

"Yeah," Wilbur says gently.

His memory is fuzzy in the way that memories fifteen years ago tend to be, but he remembers sitting in the police station, he remembers that he was told someone who could take care of him was coming for him, he remembers that Phil was someone else with wings.

None of them knew what was going to happen that day, neither of them knew that Techno would come barreling into their lives three years later, neither of them knew that Wilbur would lose his wings.

But it was the start of something— the start of when Wilbur went from *'Phil's ward'* to *'Phil's kid'* and Wilbur just— holds the ring, looking at Phil and then down at the ring again. He twists it around his finger.

“Thank you,” Wilbur says, looking at the ring and then back up at Phil, “This one’s gonna be harder to lose.”

Phil laughs, “Yeah... yeah, I guess it is.”

Wilbur looks down at the ring again, still twisting it around his finger, he glances at Phil again, and then back down at the ring once more. It’s a beautiful green gem— Wilbur doesn’t think it’s actually an emerald, but he doesn’t mind either way. It’s beautiful enough that it doesn’t matter, it’s probably not real gold either.

“Y’know, they found you with one of those,” Phil says, “Not— one with a gem, but you were wearing a ring when they found you.”

Wilbur pauses, looking up from his ring. “Huh?”

“It had a date engraved in it, we assumed that was your birthday— it lines up about right. It was on a necklace around your neck— it was too big for you.”

“Huh,” Wilbur says slowly, “Is it kept somewhere?”

“It was taken off of me,” Phil unpacks some things from his bag, placing them on the counter that Wilbur *just* cleaned, “I’m not sure where it is anymore— I’m pretty sure it had some sort of tracker in it?”

“What?” Wilbur looks up at Phil, eyes wide. “What the fuck happened in my childhood?”

“No clue, buddy,” Phil takes his lunchbox out of his bag, it’s an old lunchbox that Wilbur had when he was in primary school, it has dinosaurs on it, and is only slightly faded despite the years.

Wilbur and Phil make eye contact when Phil pulls it out. “Don’t—”

“Wasn’t going to—”

“I need to wash the other one.”

“I can’t believe you *kept it*,” Wilbur laughs, he picks up the empty lunch box and turns it over in his hands. Sure enough, there’s a neat *Wilbur Craft* signed on the bottom of the lunch box. They both pause at it. “Oh.”

A long moment of silence.

“Were you upset when I changed my last name back?” Wilbur asks, eyes still on the bottom of the lunch box.

Phil thinks for a little bit, “I don’t think so— Wilbur Soot suits you.”

“I could hyphenate it,” Wilbur murmurs, as he puts the lunch box on the counter, “Soot-Craft kinda works— Soot-Mors would be fun.”

“Fuck off.”

“She has a cooler last name than you,” Wilbur defends, “That’s not my fault— it literally means *death* . Soot and Death would make a great TV show, and it would make an even better combination of last names...” Wilbur pauses for a few moments.

Then he breaks out into the shit-eating grin, he sits down on the stool and looks up at Phil, grinning.

Phil promptly ignores him as he unpacks his bag.

“So— how are you and Kristin?”

“Wilbur.”

“Tommy told me you bonded when I almost died.”

“*Wilbur.*”

“It sounds like the perfect love story,” Wilbur coos, “You bonded over how much you both cared about me! That’s excellent for everyone involved— Kristin already has my approval by the way, she doesn’t need it of course, but she has it anyway. Can she adopt me?”

“You are twenty-five.”

“And? I deserve it. I almost died, remember?”

“You can’t joke about that,” Phil says tiredly, “I am not emotionally ready for it.”

Wilbur hesitates, “You’re avoiding the question,” he points at Phil using the fork he left laying on the bench, which Raspberry was trying to eat any leftovers off— which is mildly disgusting. “C’mon, tell me... I won’t tell Tommy or Techno— I might tell Daniel.”

Phil just gives him a flat look.

“Please?”

“Nothing has happened,” Phil responds, closing his eyes, “We have— a lot of shit going on Wil.”

“Surely you’ve gone out for coffee or something—” Wilbur moves so he’s perching on the chair in a way that Phil only does when he’s very stressed. “Look... I’m just saying— it might never be the right time, you might always have shit going on—”

“I am not talking about this with you,” Phil announces, he walks away from the counter, and Raspberry mews after him. “I am not getting advice from my son about this.”

“Your son can examine it from a far less biassed point!” Wilbur calls out after him, “And your son isn’t going to sabotage you!”

“Not talking to you about this!”

“You’d talk to Techno about this!” Wilbur tries.

It’s quiet for a few moments, and Wilbur thinks he’s almost guilted Phil into listening to him.

Instead, Phil slowly turns around and just *stares* at Wilbur. “That is the stupidest shit you’ve ever said— Techno would rather eat his hand.”

Which is correct.

But Wilbur isn’t going to admit that any time soon.

Instead, he just smiles.

Phil rolls his eyes, and turns back around. “You’re the worst!”

“Oh, yeah? Did ya say that while I was in a coma?”

“Yes actually,” Phil deadpans, still walking through the house, and starting to walk up the stairs, “That’s what I said word for word—”

“Knew it,” Wilbur replies with a grin.

Phil yells something back, but Wilbur can’t hear it.

He looks at Miss Raspberry, sitting on the counter.

“He’s a good parent,” Wilbur confesses to Raspberry, who will keep a good secret. He glances over his shoulder, “To me at least—” he laughs shortly, holding out his hand which Raspberry headbutts.

Upstairs he can hear the sound of Phil running into a cupboard and then yelping.

Wilbur snorts, looking back at Raspberry. “Well, we have a lot of The Great British Bake Off to get through—”

Raspberry sighs at him.

Wilbur has no clue if cats can actually sigh.

It sounds like Raspberry sighs either way though.

Wilbur snorts at that.

“You’re a good cat.”

Raspberry mews at him.

Wilbur has to stop himself from making the same noise back.

He sighs. “Okay. Miss Raspberry—”

She looks up at him expectantly.

She knows her own name!

Wilbur has never felt prouder.

He picks up Miss Raspberry, putting her on his shoulder in a way that she seems to quite enjoy. Once again, she tangles her claws into his hair, and Wilbur sighs, trying to detangle

Raspberry from his hair.

So they watch... Bake Off, and when Wilbur starts insulting how long they're putting their meringues in the beater before starting to try and pipe them— he figures that it's time for him to go to sleep.

“Well,” Wilbur explains, “I believe it's bedtime, Miss Raspberry. It's late...” he checks his phone which has impressively stayed in his pocket the entire time.

Yup. Is his time to go to bed.

3:12am

Alright then! Things in Wilbur's life have spiralled out of control and— that's probably not great for him. But he also needs far less sleep than the average but it is also three in the morning and whenever Wilbur went to bed after three things went terribly wrong in his life...

Wilbur slides into bed.

Rain starts on the windows, and the wind picks up.

Wilbur does his final doom scroll because he hates his mental health, but then he ends it with a photo of a cute dog so overall— things are going quite well.

He slides under the cover, and Raspberry curls up on the end of the bed.

He lays there for a few moments.

The rain is pounding against the window, it's all he can hear.

It's almost relaxing.

The first flash of thunder has Wilbur flinching.

He's twenty-five, he shouldn't be scared of fucking *thunder and lightning* .

The little traitorous, yet logical, part of his brain says he's not scared of thunder, but he's scared of loud noises and that feels slightly more justified in his brain for some reason.

Wilbur pulls the covers up more.

It's only thunder.

Just thunder.

He can handle this.

He's dealt with storms before— he lived alone until not that long ago, he dealt with storms alone. He is not calling Techno to come over and make sure that he's okay, he's not calling Phil off work for this.

Twenty-five and terrified of thunder.

Wilbur almost laughs.

Then the second crack of thunder and Wilbur flinches *hard* .

It sounds so familiar to buildings crashing down on him, three times, three times— how has that happened three times. It sounds like a bomb going off— it sounds like a gunshot, it sounds like a—

Wilbur hears the most pathetic noise that he's ever heard.

He almost thinks he makes the noise.

Then he looks up.

Raspberry is curled in on herself, and she's shaking.

Oh.

She's also scared of the thunder.

Wilbur's heart breaks a little bit, and he sits up more, shuffling so his back is leaning against the headboard of the bed. He reaches out and grabs Raspberry from her spot towards the end of his bed.

“Hey,” Wilbur coos and Raspberry peers up at him. “We're okay— it's just a storm, we're okay.”

Another flash of lightning outside the window.

Wilbur braces himself for the thunder that happens a few moments later.

Okay.

Okay.

He's okay.

They're both okay.

Raspberry curls into herself even more.

"I know, I know," Wilbur whispers, "I know, it's a bit shitty. We're safe though, you're safe. I know."

Another rumble of thunder and Raspberry makes a small noise, and Wilbur just hugs her a little bit more. "We're okay, we're okay. It's okay." Wilbur is shaking too, trying to keep images out of his mind.

It's failing.

But right now he needs to hold a scared cat.

"I think we should watch some YouTube," Wilbur explains to Raspberry who doesn't move even slightly, Wilbur runs his hands through her fur. "You're okay— it's okay, I got you. Nothing will hurt you."

Raspberry mews.

Wilbur softens a little bit. "I think we should watch— uh— long video essays about a movie we've never seen. Does that sound amiable to you, Miss Raspberry?"

Raspberry curls more into his chest.

Wilbur takes that as a yes, and grabs his phone.

Another rumble of lightning and Wilbur scratches underneath Raspberry's chin, and she barely flinches or curls in on herself. Neither does Wilbur.

He turns on the video essay, getting comfortable before shuffling down slightly, Raspberry curls up on his chest, and Wilbur pets her as he vaguely watches the video. He doesn't pay *much* attention as sleep drags on his entire body, he just yawns a lot.

"It's a bad day," Wilbur coos to her, "But that's okay— we're gonna get through this, and then tomorrow's gonna be good— I'll even let you have a bit of chicken or something, I think we deserve it."

Eventually, Raspberry becomes a rumbling, snoring cat on his chest, and Wilbur's own eyes flutter shut.

Raspberry doesn't leave again after that.

Over the next week or so, the beginnings of a plan start to form.

They're not the most— laid out plans but between Tubbo's knowledge of— basically everything, and Aimsey's and Sniff's knowledge of how the tower works and the new security measures means the semblance of a vague plan is formed.

They get Tubbo into the tower— there are already a bunch of flaws in that part of the plan, but they're not quite at the point of flushing those out.

Then they get Tubbo up to William Nelson-Jones's office. Once again, a lot easier said than done. If that doesn't work, then Tubbo tries to go through a lower employee's computer to access the hidden files on the servers.

If that doesn't work, then Tubbo takes down the servers completely— that won't do a lot, it will just give them a little bit extra time, and give Tubbo great joy, who seems to be very excited about snooping around restricted government files.

Then... work from there.

Another option, if Tubbo doesn't have a lot of time to download everything off the computer, which looks painfully likely— he can give access to a burner account, which would be risky because of how it could be traced. Or Tubbo can just take the computer itself.

That option is looking increasingly likely as they talk about it.

Right now, Aimsey is trying to get the first step down. How to get Tubbo into the heroes tower.

"I don't know how to get them in," Aimsey says, still folded over the blueprints of the tower. Multiple were printed out and spread around the table, there was a 3D one up on the tablet propped up (thanks to Tubbo.) "The security was hard before— now it's damn near impossible, Henry scans anyone who walks through."

Gugpie is sitting on a nearby chair, both feet up on the table as they hold a tablet just above their face and amuses herself by spinning the tower around very quickly, similar to how Aimsey would with Sims sometimes.

"Have you asked Techno?"

“I’m not further implicating him in any of this,” Aimsey explains, she leans back and pulls a thread on the edge of their beanie. “He took a chance on me, I’m not gonna repay that by turning around and just— not.”

“Alright...” Guqqie says slowly.

And Aimsey is very aware of Guqqie hovering over his shoulder, they are very aware of Guqqie as she breathes in and out, and Aimsey stays perfectly still in place. They don’t risk looking over at Guqqie’s, surely confused expression.

Instead, Aimsey stays almost perfectly still, trying to look at the maps of the tower and inevitably failing because Guqqie is quite close. Guqqie hums and Aimsey manages to keep their eyes on the maps in front of them.

Guqqie then reaches around Aimsey’s other side, so it’s almost like a hug, and she snatches the laptop off the table, the laptop with the written security protocol, as obtained by Aimsey a week or so ago.

She pulls back and Aimsey’s thoughts start working again.

“Alright,” Guqqie says, starting to pace around the kitchen table. “The easiest way is through the temporary pass system.”

“They clock everyone going through now, each time,” Aimsey says, “Niki used to just be able to go through if they saw it, now they scan them all. There will be a record of Tubbo being in the building at the time that the files were stolen.”

Guqqie hums again. “Well— do you know who the head of security is?”

“Kristin, she’s nice— but she’s not gonna let me bring anyone in just because. Not after the tower attack.”

Guqqie looks up again, they stare off into the distance for a moment, glaring at the wall like it’s wronged her, “Well— Techno and Kristin are close, right?”

“Guqqie,” Aimsey sighs.

“Techno can bring Tubbo in.”

“We’re not having Techno tied to any of this shit,” Aimsey repeats, “We need another way to get them in, we’re not getting through security without being noticed, we have to go around security.”

“If that goes wrong then Tubbo’s fucked.”

“If he gets caught then Tubbo’s fucked—” Aimsey responds sharply. “We need to get him past the first step, then he’s in. Henry might be tracking him, but we can just chalk that up to mistakes, or Tubbo can fuck with Henry—”

“Could Tubbo disable Henry for a bit?” Sniff asks.

A door swings open, and Tubbo walks in, sipping at a milkshake and on his phone, Ranboo looms over his shoulder.

“Oh,” Tubbo says, “We’re worrying about that?”

Guqqie and Aimsey both look at him, confusion in Aimsey’s eyes.

Tubbo glances over his shoulder, “Guys... Ranboo can teleport.”

Aimsey’s eyes immediately shoot towards Ranboo, and Ranboo looks firmly at the ground. He’s wearing some scuffed-up sneakers that probably need replacing.

“Well...” Guqqie says, “What name are we giving Ranboo? If we’re the Anemoi, there’s only four.”

“There’s lesser winds,” Tubbo says, knocking Ranboo’s rib with his elbow. “Oi, wanna be a lesser wind? The code names are important.”

“Sure?”

A moment of silence as Guqqie started Googling. “Caecius, Apheliotes, Skiron or Lips—”

“Uh— Caecius sounds the coolest?” Ranboo says, looking at Tubbo.

Tubbo shrugs, before clapping Ranboo on the back, “Welcome to the Anemoi Crew, we’re overthrowing the hero committee— I’m gonna need you to teleport in, thanks bro.”

Ranboo looks beyond confused.

“Taking down the hero committee— all in a day’s work!” Tubbo takes another obnoxious slurp from his milkshake, “Anyway— found the first thing I could, even without the secretive files.”

Tubbo puts his phone on the table, before also placing the now-empty milkshake container. “Alright... here was the easy stuff to find. Lynelle Archer is cheating on her wife with— Annette Kingstone.”

“WHAT THE FUCK?” Aimsey yells. “Two members of the hero committee are having affairs— with each other?”

“Yup,” Tubbo says smugly, “Also found out Harry Laurier is head of media— that was easy, I just had to find the minutes from their meetings. Which are public by the way— so I know the jobs of all of them, and I can guess what I need to look for now.”

Tubbo stops talking and sighs, he’s looking at Aimsey now.

It’s clear Tubbo wants approval right now, that’s just how Tubbo rolls. He needs approval almost constantly, mostly from Aimsey. Aimsey doesn’t know if Tubbo’s trying to impress Aimsey, or Aimsey is the only person who consistently gives Tubbo praise because Tubbo is brilliant at almost everything he does.

Sometimes Aimsey almost feels sad about the fact someone as smart as Tubbo wants praise so much, Tubbo should know he’s amazing—

Aimsey gives him a wide smile, “Tubbo, that’s amazing!”

“Yeah!” Guqqie speaks up now *thanks Guqqie* . “Those are the first steps for sure.”

Tubbo smiles like someone told him he now has a million dollars in his bank account, and picks up the empty milkshake container, “Okay— cool, I’m working on trying to find tax returns but that’s proving to be a bit tricky— I can do it though, I can— yeah.”

Then Tubbo turns on his heel and basically sprints out of the room.

Ranboo stands there for a long moment, tilting their head first at Aimsey, then eyes darting down the hallway and the heavy footsteps that imply Tubbo is running as fast as he can.

He glances at Aimsey and Guqqie, eyes eventually settling on Aimsey. “I need you to tell him that his value to your group isn’t only determined by the amount of work he does for you lot. He’s going to—”

Ranboo takes another deep breath, “He’s going to run himself into the ground like this. I’ve seen him do this before and it’s very not pretty.”

Aimsey opens their mouth to reply, but Ranboo is gone before Aimsey can even get any words out that are lodged in the back of their throat.

Okay... then.

Sure.

Ranboo’s departure leaves a slightly sickening silence across the pair of them.

Guqqie remains quiet for a long moment, they’re sitting with their legs hugged to their chest, and Aimsey sits down across from her. Guqqie’s eyes flicker up to his and for a moment neither of them say anything.

There’s just some heavily charged eye contact.

“There’s an easier way to do this,” Guqqie whispers and Aimsey tilts his head at her.

Guqqie glances around to make sure the room is empty— the room is empty and they both know it, Guqqie looks down at her hands and then back up at Aimsey.

“We say they arrested Theseus.”

Aimsey stares at them, mouth slightly open.

The thing about that is that... it would work, it would work really well. There's no way the heroes can really prove that they don't have Theseus— Theseus has been gone for a few weeks now, maybe almost a month?

If they claimed that Theseus had been arrested—

There would be riots in the street, it would almost certainly force a resignation. If not a resignation people would look harder at any dodgy things the hero committee was doing— there might be an inquest.

Guqqie and Aimsey were quiet for a long moment, stewing in the plan.

“I don't— I don't think they do have Theseus though,” Aimsey says, “Techno would know if they did, and he hasn't been acting— odd.”

“It doesn't matter,” Guqqie explains, “If they have him or not, we need people to think they have him. That's all that matters—”

“Then Theseus is a real person,” Aimsey whispers, slightly frantically, “And you can't put this decision in one person's lap. Obviously he wants to be hidden right now, it's not fair to push him to make the decision— to reveal he's still around unless he wants to start a civil war.”

Guqqie scowls.

Neither of them say anything after that.

Guqqie leaves without a word, but a look in their eye that Aimsey doesn't like at all. Defiance is something that Aimsey could almost expect right now, and that would startle him

less. What startles him more is— the determination in Guqqie’s eyes.

And Aimsey knows she can’t do anything about it.

Xe doesn’t think Guqqie will say it now. He thinks it might become a frantic, last-ditch effort.

They are terrified of what Guqqie could do— and he’s terrified he knows he would never stop Guqqie.

It’s a quiet night, and for once everyone is at Phil’s. Techno, Phil and Daniel are all asleep, Wilbur can hear Techno snoring even from downstairs.

Wilbur is half-heartedly scrolling on his phone, while Tommy is sitting in front of a pile of paperwork so high that Wilbur has to sit up straight and lean to the side a little to see Tommy over the top of it.

Wilbur looks down at his hands, he twirls the ring on his hand. With the new emerald gem around it, it looks like he might be getting engaged or some shit— which he is not. It’s nice to have something on his hands that he can fidget with though.

He spins it around a few times, before rapping the gem against the table.

Tommy glances up at him, then looks back at the papers on the table.

“What’s that about?” Wilbur asks, trying to see what Tommy’s working on right now.

“About how you almost died,” Tommy says absent mindedly, “Techno said I wasn’t allowed to go find Elysium and tear out their throats— so—” he lifts the paper up a little bit more.

Wilbur laughs.

It's a joke right?

Tommy isn't laughing.

Okay... then.

Wilbur isn't going to think about too hard— nor is he going to think about the confidence Tommy had while wielding a gun in his apartment— that's something he's not going to worry about.

It's fine.

Things are fine.

They both go back to what they were doing, Wilbur messes with the ring and absent-mindedly pets Raspberry on the back. Raspberry walks around the table, seemingly intent on causing mild issues. She keeps pushing pens off of the table.

Every time she does, her and Tommy have a staring contest.

Wilbur eventually goes to look for a book, or something else to do— he finds one that looks exciting enough and returns back to the room. He sits back in the seat across from Tommy.

Tommy is completely still.

Raspberry is pushing pens and pencils off the table, glancing at Tommy, and when Tommy doesn't react she will push another one off the table. Wilbur looks at Tommy's eyes— calling his eyes distant feels like too light of a word to use.

Tommy's hand is curled around a pencil, his knuckles and fingers are white from how hard he's holding the pencil. He's staring forwards blankly, it's clear whatever he's thinking about is not in this room—

And Wilbur knows this quite well, he knows this from himself— and more importantly he knows this from Techno. Techno who instead of crying would just zone out for a few hours, or Techno who would snap pencils in his grip instead of expressing his emotions in a slightly healthy way.

Wilbur shuffles in his chair slightly, "Tommy," he says as gently as he can.

"You almost died." Tommy eventually says, his eyes still far-away, "Theseus could've killed you— Elysium almost killed you— I almost died. So much has happened— y'know it's only been a month since the library in Kinoko?"

"I did know that," Wilbur says slowly, "It's been a busy couple of weeks."

Tommy is still gripping the pencil with a lot of force, looking at Wilbur but not quite seeing him.

Wilbur wants to have Techno on speed dial, because whatever explosion of emotions is about to happen is one that Wilbur in no way, shape, or form is ready for— he doesn't really handle Tommy's emotions, that's a more Techno job.

He doesn't want to fuck things up beyond what he can fix.

Tommy blinks, and he's looking at Wilbur now. His eyes are slightly wide as he stares directly at Wilbur.

Wilbur tilts his head slightly, “You okay, Tommy?”

“No,” Tommy says, “No— not even slightly. Holy shit— you almost died, you keep almost dying— stop that. And—” he cuts himself off, but his mouth opens like he has more to say. Tommy’s shoulders then slump and he sinks down in his seat.

Like whatever force has been keeping him going for the last few days is gone from his body, he slumps over almost completely and shakes his head. “Oh fuck— oh fuck—”

“You’re safe here,” is the first thing Wilbur says, “Okay? You’re safe here— whatever you need—”

Tommy near-slams his head into the table, then uses his inner arm to cover the sides of his head and then his hands tangle into his hair where they just stay there, he doesn’t pull on his hair, and Wilbur’s thankful for that.

His shoulders shake with sobs as Wilbur just... sits there. Wilbur is pretty sure there’s a meme to accurately depict how he’s feeling right now, but he can’t think of it because he’s just staring at Tommy who’s having a full blown breakdown at the kitchen table.

He doesn’t know if he should reach out to Tommy right now, or if Tommy needs space and time to himself, if Tommy wants to be alone right now—

“Do you want me to grab Techno?” Wilbur asks as gently as he can, he reaches out towards Tommy and then draws his hand away.

Tommy doesn’t respond.

“I’ll go wake up Techno.”

Wilbur stands up, the book long abandoned on the table, he goes to walk past Tommy and Tommy's hand juts out, grabbing Wilbur by the wrist and holding on tight. Wilbur almost, just out of habit, draws his hand away completely.

“Don’t—” Tommy rasps out, “Don’t leave.”

And Wilbur nods, he pulls out the chair next to Tommy and sits on it. Tommy stills holds onto his wrist and collapses back onto the table, this time using his free arm more like a pillow than a shield.

Wilbur slowly tries to extract all the paper from underneath Tommy, because he knows future Tommy will be very upset if he ruins the paperwork by crying on it. He manages to get most of the paper out of the way into a little pile.

Tommy just cries, Wilbur doesn't know what to do for a long moment.

What would Techno do?

Wilbur doesn't know what the fuck Techno would do— Techno's always been the one who handles the big emotions and Wilbur's like— the fun brother, the one who fucked off to university.

Alright— what would Phil do?

Wilbur knows that one better.

He shuffles forwards a little bit, breaking his wrist out of Tommy's grip and slowly wrapping an arm around Tommy's shaking shoulders. Tommy doesn't even flinch as he does it, he doesn't stop crying either.

“It’s okay,” Wilbur says, “You’re gonna be okay— I know, this last month has been terrifying for you. You’re okay, everyone’s gonna be okay—”

“People died!” Tommy rasps out, “Eight people died!”

“I know, I know,” Wilbur tries to keep his voice as gentle as he can— he doesn’t think it succeeds a lot, because Tommy starts crying even harder *shitty fuck shit*. Wilbur hugs Tommy towards him, “You’re okay though— you’re allowed to be upset about this, it’s really sad.”

“You— you went through— so much— more— and I’m here— blubberin’.”

Wilbur almost wants to slap Tommy a little bit.

“Don’t compare— you need the help right now, not me.”

Tommy nods.

And then he keeps on crying, he’s a mostly silent crier (at least this time, and Wilbur doesn’t want to think too hard about why Tommy is so good at suppressing his sobs.) His shoulders shake, and every now and again Tommy buries himself in his arms or even in his own shirt, pulling the collar of the shirt up over his own face.

Wilbur just hugs him to his side, hoping that’s what Tommy needs right now.

This past— *month* has been a lot.

Wilbur thinks he’s handling it better than Tommy and that seems easy enough to do considering the way that Tommy’s having a breakdown right now.

Wilbur doesn't say anything, he just sits there, hand on Tommy's shoulder as his head is on the table and he cries. His shoulders shake and the only sign he's crying apart from that is the occasional shuddering breaths.

"You're okay," Wilbur says gently, and Tommy's shoulders shudder, "I'm gonna be okay—we're both going to be okay, Tommy."

Sometimes Tommy manages to get it together with shuddering breaths, before he looks at Wilbur, opening his mouth to say something and he starts silently sobbing again, hiding his face with his arm.

This keeps on going a few times, until Tommy manages to get himself back together, his breathing is shaky and there are still tear tracks on his face, but he manages to look Wilbur in the eye.

"I'm so glad you're okay," Tommy says.

Then promptly bursts into tears again.

Wilbur hugs Tommy to him slightly, and Tommy leans into him.

"I'm okay," Wilbur says, as soothingly as he can.

"I missed you so much," Tommy says through sobs and shuddering breaths, "When you were — out, I missed you. We all missed you so much."

"I know," Wilbur means it, and he hugs Tommy's shoulders a little bit tighter, "I know, kid."

"And—" Tommy bursts out into another sob, bringing one of his arms up to his face to try and hide it, "And— I'm so sorry. I'm so, so, sorry, I can't— I'm sorry. I missed you, I miss you."

“It’s okay,” Wilbur doesn’t think he sounds very comforting but he’s trying, and for once he thinks that’s what really counts. “It’s okay, I’m okay— you’re going to be okay. Sometimes bad things happen.”

“Nothing else bad will happen to you,” Tommy promises, and the confidence in his voice almost makes Wilbur believe it. “It can’t— I don’t want to have to go to work if you’re not there— I don’t want to be around Techno and Phil and your family if you’re also not there. I — I want you to be here Wil, you can’t go dying on me!”

Wilbur brushes some of Tommy’s hair out of his face, before wiping the tears off of Tommy’s face with his sleeve. Tommy looks at him again, he looks like he might burst into tears again.

“I can’t promise that, Tommy.”

Tommy just stares at him, before leaning against his shoulder and resting his head on Wilbur’s shoulder. He cries again, this time quieter, just leaning against Wilbur, and Wilbur just holds him.

“Can you lie?”

“I can— do you want me to?”

“I’m not sure,” Tommy mumbles, “Just be okay.”

“I’ll try.”

They’re both quiet for a long moment, Tommy still leaning against him.

It starts raining outside, just the peaceful patter of rain against the windows and the roof. It's relaxing, and Wilbur can almost fall asleep at this, it's really relaxing, and Wilbur's shoulders relax.

"Hey... Tommy," Wilbur says slowly, and Tommy glances towards Wilbur. "I think..." Wilbur takes a deep breath.

Raspberry is on the table, whacking Tommy in the hand because someone other than her is showing Wilbur any amount of affection.

"Tommy, I think we should go to therapy."

Tommy looks straight ahead, before glancing back down at the papers.

Wilbur looks down at his ring again, and he twists it around his finger, taking the ring off and then putting it back on again. It's a nice distraction to have, and Wilbur's glad he has it— Phil and Techno made a good choice with this one.

Maybe he needs a fidget ring too.

Raspberry might attempt to eat that though.

Tommy turns his head a little bit, "Yeah..." Tommy says slowly, he doesn't make eye contact with Wilbur, but he also looks at the ring that Wilbur's playing with.

The rain keeps pattering on the window, Raspberry keeps trying to eat paper from Tommy, or just whack him in the face— or something else. Wilbur keeps fidgeting with his ring and Tommy keeps writing.

For the first time... in a long time, Wilbur thinks things will be alright.

There's been a weight on his ribs for years— since before he can remember. And it's still there, it might not ever go away...

But Wilbur can breathe through it, and it doesn't hurt anymore.

He keeps fiddling with his ring, time keeps moving on, Tommy keeps writing and Raspberry keeps being annoying. And he keeps on breathing.

Chapter End Notes



Chapter Summary

- dude. this chapter has like ZERO plot from wilbur's side of it. he befriends a cat and learns to take care of himself. that's it. that's the plot. I wrote wilbur playing with a cat and befriending purpled & the cat for like 15k words.
- MEANWHILE. ANEMOI. Tubbo finds out his father is on the hero committee. this shocks him, but aimsey and tubbo keep moving ahead with their plan to find blackmail on all the members. Tubbo is pretty good at it. they attempt to make plans to break into the tower, and tubbo is like "i know a guy who can teleport me in dw" and BOOM RANBOO'S A PART OF ANEMOI (they have to be a lesser wind tho. L)

- dude. wilbur's just having the best time. he's befriending a little cat, he's befriending purpled (daniel) and his best friends shubble and quackity come to visit. Techno, Phil and Tommy are gone a lot but Wilbur is THRIVING. HIS SKIN IS CLEAR (probably not but shhh)
 - oh yeah. tommy has a breakdown realising all the shit that's happened in the past month (IT'S ONLY BEEN LIKE A MONTH SINCE CHAPTER 33 BOIZ) and cries a lot. Wilbur comforts him and is like "ayo... should we like... go to therapy???"
 - the cat's name is raspberry and lives at phil's (where wilbur lives now) btw. the most important lore to ever lore
-

Tubbo gets ONE cupcake from aimsey and has decided he will deadass die for this little group. I am so genuine. Poor kid hasn't had a lot of people to show affection to, and hasn't been shown a lot of kindness recently. ALSO WILBUR HAS A CAT. This is so important to me. He's also healing! Raspberry is very much similar to a therapy animal, Wilbur is kinda forced to take care of himself because he has this small baby cat to look after. He's healing guys! I feel so incredibly proud of him. He got this!

and that concludes arc... four! That's right guys. We have our main players set up for next arc (ANEMOI!!!)

i would say i'm sorry about the break. except i'm not. and the next one is probably gonna be longer so <3

in which i honestly give tommy a break and he like talks about his feelings one time

Chapter Summary

Tommy's life is terrible, he's decided.

Theseus trauma? That was fine.

His parents? That was also fine, all of this was fine compared to this, this is it, this is the peak worst moment of his life, he is never going to live a life again after this and he will be a husk of who he used to be.

Skating sucks.

or, hello. it's been a hot minute, i've been sitting on this chapter for a while.

BUT I THINK IT'S FUN!

Chapter Notes

i'm gonna be real i wrote this chapter FOREVER ago so idk what's there. i can do a short chapter. fuck u. (is 11k)

Warnings: minor blood & injury, discussions of abuse, driving cars (and the fear of crashing but it's super silly and goofy.)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy hugs his jacket around him even more, noting the leaves falling off the trees all around him. The trees around here had turned a dark orange colour, it felt like not that long ago was Summer.

Now they're going into Winter.

He sees the too-familiar figure of Wilbur in the distance.

Wilbur also seems to see him, because Wilbur turns around and looks at Tommy face on.
“How was therapy?”

“You go first,” Tommy replies, he shoves his hands in his pockets to try to keep them warm, he forgot just how fucking cold Winter gets in L’Manberg and it’s only Autumn so far. He’s doomed if it actually starts snowing. “Wilbur Soot, how was therapy?”

“I cried really hard,” Wilbur says, he starts walking away from the building and Tommy moves with him in time, “Finally got hit with the— it’s not my fault— and I just started crying.”

“Hey, I got that last week!” Tommy says brightly.

Last week at therapy for Tommy was rough, he had finally decided to confess just a *little* bit about his parents and what his childhood was like. His therapist, Benjamin, thanks Benjamin, was very supportive and just listened as Tommy recounted everything he was comfortable with.

Well... not comfortable.

But *more* comfortable with, than... some of the other stuff.

Then Tommy had said something about how he did something to piss off his parents and he got slapped for that, and Benjamin, one of the best men, stopped him and said. “*You do know that wasn’t your fault right?*”

Then Tommy sobbed for the rest of their session.

In this moment, Wilbur just looks at him with a flat look as they keep walking. “So yeah... that was fun— turns out what happened with Eret wasn’t my fault, and like— I knew that logically, but it’s different hearing someone else say it.”

“Hmmm...” Tommy hums, tapping his chin thoughtfully, “Did you get him the right ice cream, maybe that’s why Eret decided to—”

Wilbur shoves at his shoulder and Tommy stumbles to the side, as Tommy starts cackling, throwing his head back as Wilbur uselessly slaps Tommy in the shoulder.

“You are awful, and also the worst.”

“Finally, some more content to tell Benjamin, my brother hates me everyone— that’s going down in the notebook.”

In truth, Tommy has so much content to tell Benjamin it’s just...

Half of it is not legal, and Benjamin would, in fact, have to report that he... y’know, was a vigilante, that was something that would have to happen. And while Tommy loves and adores Benjamin (one of the best men.) He is also painfully aware that if he ever says anything to Benjamin, he might as well kiss his freedom goodbye.

Yes, actively hiding things in therapy isn’t good for him.

He thinks.

Benjamin and Techno would probably think it was bad for him, but Techno doesn’t get an opinion.

“Question,” Tommy says, and Wilbur doesn’t glance at him, but Tommy knows he’s listening. “I dunno if Erika does this— but Benjamin does when you’re talking and they ask to pause and get a notebook— that feels like failing at therapy right? That feels like getting a bad grade in therapy, like—”

“Yes!” Wilbur throws both his hands up in the air, “It feels like *‘oh shit what did I say that was fucked?’* Especially if it’s a funny story, why is Erika writing while I’m attempting to talk about the time Techno threw me down the stairs.”

“Explains the brain cells.”

“Shut up.”

“So, we’re failing therapy?”

“I dunno, sometimes I make Erika laugh and then— boom, I’m passing therapy. Which is a normal and good thing to want to achieve.”

There’s a shuffle of something behind them, and Tommy immediately turns around, looking over his shoulder.

It’s Niki.

Niki!

“You are both so mentally ill,” Niki says, throwing an arm around Tommy’s shoulders. She’s a lot shorter than him, so she has to stand on her tippy-toes to manage it easily, and even though she hasn’t tried, he knows she would not manage this on Wilbur.

Niki side-eyes Wilbur, as she always does. “Wilbur.”

“Niki. What are you doing here?”

“Walking in the park?” Niki says, “Then I heard my favourite obnoxious person from Logstedchire, and then I heard you and almost thought it wasn’t worth it.”

Tommy finally manages a good glance at Niki, and he is painfully aware of the giant cut over her forehead. She doesn’t look any more tired than usual— but Niki always looks incredibly tired, she’s constantly at mid-Theseus Tommy levels.

Which are not normal or good levels to be at.

“What happened?” Tommy asks.

Niki lets go of his shoulder and her hand brushes against the scab, “Oh, that was just at karate, someone didn’t take off their ring. I’m good.”

Tommy squints at Niki.

She’s hard to read, Tommy knows that by now. Tommy has no clue if she’s being honest or just lying to save face, either way, Tommy doesn’t really know how to feel about it. He knows Purpled’s been getting increasingly more injured over the past few months, he also knows protests are still kicking off in Logstedchire, and that’s what Aurelian, Purpled and Slime are covering now.

Still no sight of Theseus.

It’s been two months.

Two and a half, technically.

Not a word from Theseus.

Some people think he's fucking died, some people think he's been arrested, and some people think he's retired. Occasionally he likes something on the Theseus Twitter account, just to make sure that people know he isn't *dead*.

He's seen some wild theories about why Theseus has gone missing.

His favourite is that he is actually the new hero recruit Aimsey. The timing adds up well enough, and it's not the first time that they've done something like that. It's also hilarious to watch people theorise about why Theseus had light hair and Aimsey decidedly does not.

Overall, it's a good time.

"Did you hear," Niki asks, and Tommy immediately knows it's not going to be good. "They arrested twelve protestors."

"Yeah," Wilbur says, "The charges won't stick though—the bail fund will get them out and the invigilators don't actually have anything against them, it was a perfectly peaceful protest..."

Both Niki and Tommy look at Wilbur, Tommy doesn't pretend he's not incredibly shocked, instead he just stares at Wilbur with his mouth slightly open.

"Since when were you aware of politics in Logstedchire?"

Wilbur just sighs, "Literally all my family are from there. Daniel, Tommy and Techno all live in Logstedchire, of course I'm gonna be aware of what's happening there."

"That's sweet," she sounds like she has just bitten into a lemon and it's an incredibly unenjoyable process for her to even say those words. If Wilbur does notice, he doesn't say anything, just looking back down at his phone.

Niki drops her arm from around Tommy's shoulders.

"Heard of the new Elysium stuff?" Wilbur, to his credit, tries to keep the disdain out of his voice and fails. "They found out the death toll from the apartment collapse was six—someone died in hospitals."

"And how many people have the heroes killed?" Niki responds, "And everyone says that's fine because—"

Tommy's heard this argument literally hundreds of times, sometimes it's between Techno and Wilbur, sometimes it's between Niki and Wilbur, sometimes it's between Niki and Techno. Techno really swings from side to side on his opinion on Elysium. It doesn't matter who out of that group of three are arguing it always ends the same.

Someone brings up the heroes, the other person says the heroes aren't *right* and neither are Elysium and then they argue in circles for what feels like hours.

Tommy never did Thanksgiving— they're not American. Nor did he ever celebrate Christmas with a big huge family— but he's pretty sure this is what relatives arguing about politics feels like.

"No one says that's *fine*," Wilbur stresses, "Heroes have some consequences—"

"Do they? What consequences did you face for—"

"More than Elysium that's for sure— I've never killed anyone."

Tommy pauses to just give Wilbur a long glance.

Wilbur promptly ignores him.

Great, Wilbur's just lying now.

“Directly,” Niki stresses, “There's the November 16th Apartment Collapse— could you not be considered responsible in the same way that Elysium is?”

“I guess—”

“And you weren't hailed as a criminal for it!”

“I kinda was!”

“Can we not?” Tommy asks and both pairs of eyes shoot to him, “Like— come on.”

Both Niki and Wilbur shuffle with the appropriate amount of shame that the situation requires and Tommy huffs, walking slightly in front of both of them, in both an attempt to get them to bond over him being grumpy and—

Escape.

Escape whatever the fuck that is.

Tommy sighs, if Niki and Wilbur could get along *one* time. That doesn't feel like too much of an ask, yet here Tommy is, begging for them to get along.

“Niki?” Tommy asks, turning around to Wilbur and Niki who are both glaring at each other but know that if they start anything Tommy's gonna snitch to Purpled. “Do you wanna go annoy Techno?”

Niki's eyes light up. "Always."

"And Wilbur—" Tommy grins, "Do you want to annoy Techno?"

"... not that badly."

"More for us!" Tommy says brightly, "C'mon Niki— I think we should make him those shitty cereal bars again."

"He hates them," Niki defends.

"Exactly!"

(And when Niki and Tommy show up with a tupperware container filled with cereal bars, Techno genuinely looks the most mad that Tommy has seen him in— months, he looks at the cereal bars, then up at Niki and Tommy and back down at the tupperware container.)

(He then closes the door on them, swearing under his breath but Niki and Tommy are laughing too hard to give a shit.)

Purpled doesn't want to be dramatic— his entire thing is that he doesn't make a huge fuss about his general situation. Both Wilbur and Techno have been trying to break that out of him but it's not super effective currently.

But in theory, if he was being dramatic then he'd say that— he's fucked.

Instead, Purpled rolls out of the way as a barrelling mass of black wings throw themselves at him. He lands on the ground with a loud thump, before managing to roll back onto his feet

and keep running.

“What the fuck!” Purpled yells over his shoulder, “This is considered rude in most circles—”

He doesn’t get a response out of that, and Purpled throws himself to the side again, as Phil dives at him again. He slams his shoulder into the wall in a way that is uncomfortable, he really doesn’t want to have to shoot Phil.

Purpled is quite fond of Phil.

It appears Phil is only fond of Daniel Greyson.

Story of his fucking life.

“I don’t want to shoot you!” Purpled yells.

“You’re going to have to,” is Phil’s response, low and threatening.

Ugh.

Purpled turns around, slamming his heel into the ground and pointing the gun up in front of him. His hands are steady as he holds the gun in front of him.

He fires once.

Twice.

Phil goes dive-bombing into the ground.

“I just got those fixed!” Phil yells out.

“I fucking warned you!” Purpled yells back, his hands are shaking slightly, they really shouldn’t be— he takes a deep breath, letting his shoulders relax.

A long moment of silence.

Phil isn’t moving from his spot on the ground.

Did Purpled— just... shoot Phil?

Purpled takes a few steps forwards, “Philza? Are you alright?”

No response.

Purpled moves a little bit forwards.

Then a hand shoots out and grabs his ankle, before pulling on his ankle. And Purpled slams onto the ground. There’s a moment and then Phil is grappling Purpled, and Purpled now realises this fight was more important than he thought.

Because *oh* he’s fighting for his freedom.

Which is enough motivation that Purpled forgets the morals he was holding himself against so he didn’t hurt Phil. If Phil isn’t playing nice, neither is Purpled.

Purpled reaches up to Phil's face and sinks his nails into wherever he can, it's a lot more effort than Purpled would necessarily like, because his nails are short from biting them all the time.

It must do something because Phil cries out.

Purpled drags his nails downwards, "You are not taking me alive."

"I'd really prefer that."

"You're not fucking taking me alive!" Purpled yells again, he punches Phil in the side of the head, and Phil's head snaps to the side.

"Good thing I don't have to," Phil snarls back.

What?

What the fuck— what the fuck. What the fuck? *What the fuck?*

That shoots fear up through Purpled's entire body. This is a fight for his *fucking life*. And Purpled isn't going to just take it— he doesn't want to die, and he doesn't want to be thrown in jail. So Purpled does whatever any wise person would do—

He screams.

As loud as he can.

It's not really his style at all— this is more of a Tommy or Slime move, but he's fighting for his *fucking life* and the rules are a bit different then. He screams again for good measure, and

Phil flinches back.

Purpled brings his hand with the gun up and whacks Phil in the side of the head with the gun, then he keeps swinging as quickly as he can.

Phil falls to the side, protecting his head, before catching Purpled's wrist and bending it backwards.

"Ow, ow, ow, ow!" Purpled yells, he hesitates for a few moments— he can't win a fight against Phil, not really— not like this, he needs some Techno or Tommy level thinking here. Techno would win the fight— or make the attacker feel bad, Purpled knows that won't work. Tommy would... use people.

If Purpled can rely on one thing—

It's that people in Logstedchire stick up for each other.

So Purpled screams again, "Help!" He cries out as loudly as possible, trying to shake Phil's grip off of him, he thinks the volume that he's screaming at distorts the voice changer even more so it's a terrifying mix of auto-tuned screaming and his actual voice.

Phil's grip on him loosens.

Purpled hits Phil in the side of the head with his other hand.

That shocks Phil at least a little bit, and Purpled just screams at Phil's face again, which makes him jump.

Behind him, he hears a noise.

“What the fuck?” Someone else says.

Phil pauses completely.

Purpled swings again, this manages to get Phil off balance a little bit and he scrambles up onto his feet, looking at the new figure standing in the front of the alleyway.

Purpled prays it’s not a hero, or an invigilator, or someone who hates him specifically.

He doesn’t care that much who it is, and he barrels past them, accidently bumping shoulders and then the figure’s arm jumps out and grabs him.

Purpled’s eyes shoot up to the figure.

It’s Aimsey.

Purpled hasn’t had a lot to do with Aimsey, he’s a little bit thankful for that, Aimsey seems—more intense than Purpled’s necessarily ready for. They make eye contact, and Purpled rips his arm out of their grip.

“I’m probably supposed to arrest you,” Aimsey says.

Purpled doesn’t care to have a hero-trainee and a hero team up on him, he takes a few steps back from Aimsey, before starting to run again, barrelling into her side and shoving her to the side a little as Purpled keeps running.

He sprints, he hears Phil yelling behind him and Aimsey makes a noise that Purpled knows is the disgruntled sigh of a teenager who clearly doesn’t want to be doing something.

He's pretty sure Techno is basically fluent in those sounds, he's surrounded by teenagers who are incredibly lazy.

Checking over his shoulder, Purpled keeps running.

"Do I have to though?" Comes Aimsey's yelling, as they start off running.

Oh come on.

"*DO YOU HAVE TO?*" Purpled screams out behind him, almost stumbling over his feet as he tries to turn to look at them.

Both Phil and Aimsey are sprinting, and Purpled isn't a fan of this. He is not a fan of this—he is not a fan of this.

Purpled stumbles over his own feet again, watching as Phil swoops just in front of him, and Purpled throws himself into a side alley, grabbing the side of the wall and just looking up at the sky for a moment.

This is terrible.

For a moment he curses whatever higher power made his life like this, then he throws himself to the side again, curling over himself as Phil hits the wall where his head just was. Phil makes a noise as he impacts the wall.

"For fuck's sake!" Purpled screams at him, "Can you fucking not— I want to go home."

He throws himself out of the way of another dive-bomb from Phil, before holding his gun out in front of him. "I will fucking shoot you. I can fucking shoot you— stop doing this."

It's a bit useless, and Purpled is painfully aware of that— that everything is weird and not quite working for him today. He has no way of contacting anyone who can help him— he half wants to warn Tommy to start a break out plan.

This is... not ideal, is the nicest way that he can put it. He turns around a corner, stumbling over his own feet and he slams into the wall.

He slams into the side of a wall, hitting his head. Before he ducks as low as he can, making himself as small as possible and he breathes for a few moments, as he hears the flap of wings and ragged breathing soar past him.

And Purpled lets himself rest for three moments.

That's one of his mistakes.

He leans against the wall with a sigh, closing his eyes as he just breathes in and out. For a moment everything is okay, and he will— well, be okay. He sighs and runs a hand through his hair.

He's okay.

Then he stands up.

His second mistake is that he hears the honk of a car horn too close to him, and he jumps, whipping to face it, therefore, turning his back on the darkness of the alley.

It's at that moment that Purpled realises his mistakes.

Something grabs him, and at that moment Purpled knows it's Aimsey, just by the energy surrounding them. It's how he identifies Tommy, the Telekinesis Duo (as he has now dubbed

them) carry that power with them everywhere they go, it's a wonder that no one else has noticed that Tommy has it.

Aimsey grabs Purpled, pulling him back into the shadow and pressing a hand over his mouth. Purpled goes to scream, goes to elbow Aimsey in the stomach and Aimsey shifts out of the way in a way that Purpled would almost be impressed by if he wasn't about to get thrown into jail.

"Shut the fuck up," Aimsey hisses into his ear and Purpled goes still.

He knows when an allyship has been offered to him.

Aimsey takes their hand off his mouth and steps out in front of him. "Okay," he whispers, looking over their shoulder and back at Purpled, "Can you like— fuck off to Techno's or something, because you currently have about five heroes out actively looking out for you."

"Five?" His voice is beyond frantic.

"They're really determined to catch you, I just want to know who you are—"

And Purpled, Purpled who has known Tommy for a long time, and fought him longer than they were friends. Purpled who taught Tommy hand-to-hand and Purpled who knows Tommy's powers perhaps the second best of anyone—

He knows what it looks like when someone activates their powers.

Sees the sparks fly around Aimsey's hands.

And he knows something in the back of his head, and he's moving before he can even stop himself. The same instincts that trained Tommy, he supposes.

He lunges for Aimsey, managing to twist himself around so they're both facing the same way, sticking his leg out to the side slightly, and hauling Aimsey's weight forwards, so they trip over his outstretched leg.

Aimsey lands on the ground with a thump, and Purpled's just glad that Aimsey knows how to fall, because getting them hurt because that would be really awkward to explain. Aimsey's eyes are wide and their hands outstretched in front of them.

"Don't." Purpled grits out, "Alright— you're undertrained and not ready for this. If I was actually a terrible person I could kill you like this."

"You're fucked up— you're fucked up, let me go—"

"You were going to rip the mask off my face!" Purpled says, "Look— I don't doubt your power, I've seen powers similar to yours in action, and you are a powerful person. But right now, you're not fucking trained. Stay down. Not everyone will let you go like this."

"You're letting me go?"

"The last time a vigilante beat the shit out of a hero it made my life worse," Purpled says, he takes a few steps backwards, "So I'm not gonna fuck things up for Aurelian and Slime." He takes a few more steps back.

Aimsey doesn't move, just staring at Purpled.

Purpled takes more careful steps back, before he turns around and jumps up to what seems like a foothold, his other hand meeting the pipe that snakes up the wall, as he scrambles up the wall as high as he can.

He jumps over to the other wall.

Then he decides that he's too nosy for his own good and lands so he's crouched by something that can ideally hide him. He presses his back against the air conditioning unit and tries not to breathe too loudly.

He really needs to work on his cardio.

"Where'd he go?" That's Phil's voice, distant but not distant enough for Purpled's comfort. Purpled pulls the gun out, he knows there are still enough bullets in it for him to make Phil's life pretty bad.

Aimsey is quiet for a few long, terrifying moments.

"I don't know," they say, "I lost him a bit ago— thought he went this way but—" they trail off.

Purpled lets out a sigh of relief, before getting back up onto his feet and running as quickly as he can in the direction of his apartment. He doesn't hear the flap of any more wings, in the distance there is protesting— the protests have barely stopped, Logstedchire might be on the verge of a civil war at this point.

There's fighting most nights, and Purpled couldn't be prouder of his home.

He runs across the rooftops, pressing against walls and hiding behind dumpsters when the helicopter searchlights get uncomfortably close to him. Then eventually, just before he reaches his apartment he relaxes.

For a moment he stops running, before carefully making his way towards the bedroom window he's so used to jumping out of. He slides it open carefully, listening for any noise. Tommy is terrible at telling him when there are guests over.

It's suspiciously quiet, and Purpled pauses for a moment, before getting out of his vigilante gear and into his normal clothes.

He can hear Tommy humming in the kitchen now, it's been a while since he's done that. He steps out into the living area, and Tommy is leaning against the counter, ignoring the fact that whatever he is cooking is burning and scrolling on his phone.

"Hey Purps," Tommy doesn't even look up. "We're going ice skating tomorrow."

"We're going to who, what now?"

"Ice skate," Tommy deadpans, "Phil was gonna go but he had a nasty run in with this bitch ass vigilante Purpled." His eyes finally flicker up to Purpled, "You good?"

His ribs ache, breathing isn't as easy as he'd like it to be—he probably has a concussion and his hands hurt as well. There's blood underneath his fingernails from where he tore at Phil's face hoping for anything.

Instead of saying any of that he gives a nod.

"Fine."

He goes to the bathroom to patch up his wounds.

"You'll be good for tomorrow?" Tommy calls through the bathroom door.

"I'll be fine," Purpled replies.

He washes the blood off of the hand towel the best he can.

Tommy's life is terrible, he's decided.

Theseus trauma? That was fine.

His parents? That was also fine, all of this was fine compared to this, this is it, this is the peak worst moment of his life, he is never going to live a life again after this and he will be a husk of who he used to be.

Skating sucks.

"Tommy, you can't skate—" Techno says, exasperatedly for what feels like the thousandth time.

"No, no, I got this," Tommy holds onto the wall with both hands, his legs sliding in just about every direction as he holds onto the wall with everything he has. His knuckles are white from how hard he's gripping the wall.

Just as Tommy manages to straighten himself up—

Purpled skids next to him, stopping perfectly and raising an eyebrow, "Still having trouble?"

If Tommy was trusting himself to be able to let go of the wall on the side, he'd poke Purpled in the bruises he has on his face.

Whatever fight he had with Phil last night was nastier than Tommy thought it was, he has a black eye, several cuts on his forehead and when Wilbur tried to ask Purpled about it Purpled actually snarled at him. Wilbur had backed off after that.

Now Purpled looks like he had a fight with a famous wrestler and lost.

“Fuck off, Daniel!” Tommy mutters, “Not all of us learnt how to skate?”

“You didn’t?” Comes another, annoying, obnoxious voice as Wilbur stops next to Purpled, leaning over the wall so he’s looking more directly at Tommy. “The skating rink is free? Do you need a penguin?”

“The kids use those to learn,” Purpled adds, like a complete shithead of a friend.

Tommy just looks up at him and snarls.

Techno raises both of his eyebrows at that, before sighing, “Okay— one of you needs to direct him.”

“Get on the ice,” Purpled says.

Techno rolls his eyes, “I have no balance with the prosthetic for skating— I can’t flex my foot or really bend my knee, and I could go on—”

Purpled huffs.

“Wilbur, stop being a little shit and help Tommy skate,” Techno says, before giving Wilbur a pointed look.

Wilbur sighs, “Come on... it’s not my fault—”

Techno then reaches over the wall and grabs Wilbur, dragging him about ten metres away from Purpled and Tommy and starting to talk to him in what seems like a dangerous tone. Techno keeps his voice quiet, but it seems that what he’s saying is making Wilbur slightly scared for his own safety.

Purpled sighs dramatically, “So—” he deadpans, “How’s it goin’?”

“Terrible, you’re a shithead and Wilbur’s a fuckface.”

“Creative.”

“I try to be.”

Purpled looks at him for a moment, not meeting his eyes in the way that he does.

Tommy looks away.

“Oh, you’re actually upset.”

Tommy doesn’t look at Purpled, instead just glaring at the spot on the floor. He would storm off if he wasn’t about halfway around the rink from any sort of exit, and him trying to leave would mean he’d eat shit and land on his ass.

“Oh, childhood thing,” Purpled says, “Is this a missing out on a childhood thing?”

Tommy glares at him.

“So it is?” Purpled sighs, turning around so his legs are against the wall and he’s looking out at all the people skating. “Sorry Wil and I are being fucks about it.”

They’re both quiet for a moment.

“Just— missed out on a lot of things,” Tommy mumbles, “Don’t wanna bring the mood down, this has been fun... it just... sucks to know what I missed out on. I can’t drive— I can’t skate, I can barely ride a bike— I’ve never built a treehouse or whatever kids do. Sleepovers and stuff... it’s dumb to miss a normal childhood that I never got. You didn’t either but—”

“I did for a little bit,” Purpled says, in a way that is probably supposed to be comforting in the weird Purpled way. “When Punz and I left— when I was little, I have done some normal childhood shit, not a lot, but enough.”

Tommy scowls.

“We can make those up though,” Purpled says hopefully, he hops up so he’s sitting on the wall of the skating rink and his skates are dangling just above the ice. “All the childhood shit you missed out on— I’ll teach you how to ride a bike, I’m sure Wilbur would teach you how to drive if you asked— it might not be the same but it’ll be something.”

Tommy just looks at him for a moment.

Then he shrugs.

“You’re being difficult—”

“Yes.”

Wilbur and Techno come back over, Wilbur smoothly skating, “Alright, we’re gonna get you to be a skating expert by the end of this— now, Daniel and I are gonna skate either side. I’m gonna drag you and Daniel is gonna try and make sure you don’t eat shit.”

“Thanks,” Tommy murmurs.

Then before he can be too grumpy about this, and start swearing at people, Wilbur has him by the wrists and is yanking him forwards. Tommy yelps as he's jerked forwards. He bends his knees slightly as he's dragged forwards.

Techno starts laughing, getting out his phone.

"You got this," Wilbur says.

Tommy does not got this.

He falls onto his ass no fewer than three times while being dragged around by Wilbur, and that's with all the time Purpled manages to save him from falling— and also including the time that Tommy manages to drag Purpled and Wilbur down with him.

That time is the most impressive because Tommy screams and grabs Wilbur and Purpled very tightly and uses Wilbur as a shield as he crashes onto the ice, it's very impressive and something Tommy probably shouldn't be able to do because he's an intern.

Still, he does it, and Techno is cackling so hard that he also falls over.

They agree to stop skating after that, and they all huddle in the skating rink cafe around coffees and hot chocolates (Tommy isn't allowed coffee because Techno is sure he would genuinely bounce off the wall.)

"I can already bounce off the wall though," Tommy murmurs as the hot chocolate, with two cute little marshmallows is places in front of him.

"You can not," Purpled says.

“I literally can,” Tommy pushes out of his seat, before cracking his knuckles, “I’m gonna do one of those flips against the wall, like where you run up and—”

“Please, please, please, do not, people train for years to be able to do that,” Wilbur says, “I did training for years—”

Tommy runs at the wall.

His first foot lands correctly, and he steps up as quickly as he can, then one more.

He realises he’s losing momentum and he throws his bodyweight backwards, bringing his knees closer to his chest.

He flips over in the air.

Then lands on his feet...

Then he immediately has too much backwards momentum and falls onto his ass.

Techno looks both incredibly amused and incredibly horrified.

Everyone is watching him, and Tommy realises that was probably a bad move.

Purpled, because he’s an asshole and also the worst, gets up and starts clapping. Then everyone else does because people are sheep, and Tommy covers his face because Purpled is his *least* favourite person in the universe.

“Encore, encore!” Purpled calls out when the confused clapping dies down, and it starts up again.

Tommy pulls his hood over his head and promptly looks down at the ground and sinks down in his seat as Purpled is clapping at him. Tommy shakes his head and proceeds to drink the rest of his hot chocolate in silence.

Wilbur is talking about the new hire in security, and Purpled is also talking about the new hire, both of them seem to be arguing about it— mostly for the sake of it, Tommy's pretty sure. They seem to fight instead of showing genuine affection for each other.

“You're just mad she does her job better than you do.”

“I am not!” Wilbur says, which means he's totally mad she does her job better than Wilbur does his job. “She is annoying, she insulted my competence.”

“I insult your competence all the time! You are incompetent, she just has eyes that work!”

“You're different, you're like family.”

“I don't wanna be fucking related to you!”

They divulge into the same argument they've had over the past few months, as they keep having the argument it seems Purpled is giving into the found family dynamic, but still argues it just to have some pride.

Tommy wants to laugh about it, but instead he folds his arms on the table and rests his cheek on his arm. His head is tilted in Purpled's and Wilbur's direction so he can watch them argue as they sip at their hot chocolate and coffee respectively.

Techno nudges Tommy and Tommy turns his head the other direction so that he's looking at Techno, so that Purpled and Wilbur can't see his face anymore.

“You’re happier,” Techno says, “It’s nice to see.”

“I feel happier,” Tommy responds, he swirls the last bits of his hot chocolate around his mug. “It’s nice.”

Techno just smiles at him, it’s a gentle thing and Tommy’s still not used to people directing that much affection at him— he’s getting better though. Techno swings an arm around his shoulders and hugs Tommy towards him.

Tommy goes to say that this is nice—

Then Techno starts ruffling his hair with his other hand, and Tommy tries to fight it but Techno is a lot stronger than Tommy has ever been. Tommy yelps, trying to save his hair from being completely destroyed.

Techno lets him go, smiling at him.

It’s not quite Techno explicitly saying that he’s proud—

Tommy knows it means that anyway.

Phil approaches him one day while Tommy is attempting to sulk about the loss of his childhood. It's becoming more and more common.

Tommy doesn't know how to do a basic skill, then he sulks about how he missed out on it. This time Phil needed to change a tyre on his ute and Tommy didn't know how to use a car jack.

Now he's sitting in his office, spinning on his chair and doing just about zero work. He spins and spins, listening to whatever song Wilbur sent him.

It's upsetting.

He's missed a huge section of his development by... not having decent parents, or guardians who knew how to take care of a kid. Tommy doesn't know childhood shows that Wilbur and Aimsey talk about, Tommy doesn't know shit about shit and for some reason it's upsetting him now.

It's dumb.

He's upset that he never had a parent to help him with homework, or talk to him about taxes — he's pretty sure he's committed tax fraud because of it. No one to talk about university or help him use a drill or teach him how to actually put on fitted sheets.

Kids have to learn literally everything they know from *someone* and now Tommy has a huge section of basic skills that are just— missing because YouTube didn't really make up for the section that was missing.

It's this section of his life that isn't... anything, it was stolen from him.

There's a knock on the door, and Tommy takes off his headphones, putting them next to the computer and pulling a face.

"Yeah?"

"Can I come in?" It's Phil, clearly hesitating by the door, he doesn't say anything for a long moment and Tommy doesn't want to break the silence. "If you want time alone, that's fine—"

"Come in," Tommy grumbles.

The door swings open and Phil is standing there, his hands still seem dirty from fucking around with the ute, he looks around the office, before closing the door shut behind him.

He settles in the beanbag in Tommy's office, putting his wings over the back of it, just so his wings are brushing against the wall.

"I know what it's like," Phil starts slowly, watching Tommy's expression for anything. "To miss out on a bunch of childhood things."

Tommy pulls a face, "Your parents were normal."

"They were," Phil says with a nod, "But... I wasn't just raised by them. Uh— the person who took guardianship of me afterward, he wasn't very nice."

Tommy just stays quiet.

Phil nods, "He neglected me a lot, and when he wasn't neglecting me he was— just screaming at me."

"Don't say just screaming," Tommy murmurs, something from therapy coming to the front of his mind, "It downplays it, verbal abuse is still abuse."

"It is. That's besides the point, it meant I didn't have someone to go to for a lot of things. Never learnt how to ride a bike, I'm not as good at reading as I probably should be... I had to figure out a lot of stuff alone."

Tommy manages a smirk, "Is that why you won't ask Kristin out for coffee?"

Phil sighs, he runs a hand down his face before looking at Tommy with an *'are you kidding'* expression.

Tommy just grins.

"Kristin is a fully competent adult, she can ask me out herself. I don't have to make the first move—"

"Maybe the ball's in your court because your son almost died and you almost certainly have a skewed sense of self-perception."

Phil just gives him a flat look.

Tommy hides his laugh behind his hand, it does nothing but Phil's glare lessens a little.

"Anyway!" Phil continues a bit louder than needed, "I get what it's like, to feel like you're behind as a person. And— I know you have other people, and I'm so glad you do, but if you need help with anything, no matter how dumb you think it is. I'm here."

"Would you teach me how to ride a bike with no hands?"

Phil laughs, "Kid, I can't even ride a bike with hands. My parents didn't want me to when I was young because my wings could get caught in the spokes."

Tommy finds himself laughing at that, the image of a child Phil and his parents arguing about bikes.

They're quiet for a long time.

Tommy— knows a lot of people who have been abused, but none of them that he knows of are actively adults. Not with kids for sure. It almost gives Tommy a little bit of hope, his life hasn't been destroyed since he was five.

He hugs his knees to his chest, looking at Phil. "How— did you move on?"

Phil gives him a sad smile, "I'm not sure if I ever did."

They both sit there in silence for a few moments, Phil with his hands in his lap.

"What were their names— your mum and dad?"

"Zhara and Anthony."

"Is that where—"

"Philza comes from? Yeah. I'm aware it's a dumb name, everyone thought it was stupid and they're right but... I wanted it to feel like they were still around."

Tommy nods.

"Your parents?"

"The person who raised me that mattered was named Deo," Tommy says and Phil's eyes widen a little.

He clearly recognises the name.

"He was very nice to me," Tommy continues quickly, "He was— really young himself. I don't think he should've been raising a kid in hindsight. But he was kind to me."

Phil manages a smile, "Then I'm glad you had him."

Tommy nods. "He reminds me of Techno... I think I keep flocking to the same type of adult to keep me safe. A little bit blunt and seem scary but have a heart of gold."

Phil nods.

"Did you ever forgive him?" Tommy eventually asks.

And for a moment Phil thinks, before shaking his head. "I don't think you forgive the people who hurt you first— not really. I think it's easier to forgive someone who's dead than someone who keeps routinely hurting you."

"He's still alive?" Tommy asks, "What the fuck? Go and kill him, I'll go kill him— Techno and I can go fuck him up—"

"Wilbur and Techno don't know about this," Phil says and Tommy just stares at him blankly.

The fact that he's the first one to know out of Phil's actual kids and the strays consisting of Purpled and Tommy.

That's... not insignificant.

"They don't know your childhood was fucked?"

"They might, I haven't told them."

"Why?" Tommy asks, "Surely that puts a bunch of their own trauma into perspective? And—what?"

Phil just sighs. He sinks back into the beanbag, leaning back so he's looking up at the ceiling. He's quiet, thinking.

Tommy lets him think.

"Both Wilbur and Techno have— a lot of wrong done against them. It's hard to tell them about who I was before them, because that barely feels like me."

"I think you should tell them," Tommy says.

"I am too afraid Techno will genuinely kill... the person who raised me. Are you familiar with William Nelson-Jones?"

Tommy knows him in the way he *sorta* knows Jenkins. Some name that he doesn't worry about too much, but Nelson-Jones is the person technically paying him, so Tommy is a little bit aware. Head of the hero committee, an ass from what Tommy's overheard from the others.

"I mean. A little?"

"It was him."

Tommy goes to stand up.

Phil rolls off the beanbag so he's basically laying in front of the door. He then sits up and shakes his head.

"Nope."

"I can get him kicked out of his position, the anarchists on Twitter love me, I can—"

"Do. Not."

Tommy goes quiet for a few moments, he tilts his head, looking at Phil. He recognises the expression on Phil's face because he's seen it on his own face.

It's fear.

"You're still scared of him," Tommy says and then he sits on the floor in front of Phil. "Phil—you deal with him multiple times a week. You—you're forced to talk to your abuser? That's —"

Phil sighs. "It's more complicated than that."

"How do you know that he's not abusing someone else though?" Tommy asks, "And you speaking about it would dismantle him entirely— have you checked on the new recruits? On Quackity—"

Phil just stares at him.

Tommy takes a deep breath, "Nevermind. I just—"

"I know where you're coming from," Phil says, "But— there are too many things in play for it to be that easy."

And Tommy knows, the same way that he knows Wilbur hates loud noises and Techno doesn't like elevators and cars, and Purpled can't stand blood if his life depends on it.

He knows Phil's just telling himself that to make himself feel better.

And Tommy also knows how terrifying it is to stand up for yourself. He knows that it isn't *easy* , but he also knows it would make Phil's life simpler.

So instead of saying any of that, Tommy just nods. "Okay."

They both know that Phil's lying.

And Tommy understands why too much to call him out on it. He finally sits back into his desk chair and looks at Phil.

They have the same tired eyes.

Wilbur has kind eyes, Techno and Purpled have mistrusting eyes and Phil and himself just have bone-deep, exhausted eyes.

And he understands why now, perhaps a little more than he wants to.

Phil stands up slowly, shaking out his hands.

Tommy pretends to not see the tremor in Phil's hands, and pretends he doesn't have an identical reaction of his own. When he looks down at his hands, they're shaking slightly, barely noticeable, but Tommy notices it.

He watches Phil leaves, both of them oddly quiet.

With a sigh, Tommy runs a hand down his face.

He spins in his chair a few times.

He should really start asking people for stuff... just basic things.

Maybe he should learn how to drive.

Wilbur would teach him how to drive...

Wilbur has a lot of time on his hands— and Tommy also has a lot of time on his hands, his job is annoying as ever, but he can manage it fairly well. He's pretty sure Wilbur would teach him how to drive.

Instead of asking like a normal person, Tommy manages the skill of *not asking*, and just hoping Wilbur realises something is weird.

Wilbur does, in fact, realise something is weird about two days into Tommy acting weird, but he doesn't push. Which is very rude, considering that Wilbur pushes with every other aspect of Tommy's life.

It comes to a breaking point about a week after he and Phil talked about their various trauma, and Tommy has decided instead of asking him, he's gonna get Wilbur to ask him about what he wants to ask.

Which sounds very complicated.

Probably because it is.

Wilbur finally decides to push even slightly.

“Okay,” Wilbur says, “What the fuck do you want to ask me? You’ve been being weird for like a week—”

“I never learnt how to drive,” Tommy blurts out and Wilbur just raises an eyebrow, “I’d—I’d like to learn how to drive... and— well Phil’s busy— Techno can’t drive and well... neither can Daniel, most of the people I know can’t drive but— you can, so can you please teach me how to drive?”

Wilbur just looks at him for a moment, walking alongside him swinging his arms. Wilbur’s steps are slightly longer than his, and Tommy has to take slightly bigger steps than him.

“Sure,” Wilbur says, “Now what did you actually want to say?”

“... that?”

“Oh,” Wilbur says, “Tommy, I thought you were going to like— admit your trauma or something, and that’s why you were being weird. You just— wanted to ask to...”

“I’m not good at asking for things,” Tommy throws his arms up into the air, stopping mid-path, much to the displeasure of the two women who were trying to pass him on the path. “But uh— this would be nice, please.”

“Of course,” Wilbur says, “Yeah— I can do that. Wednesday?”

“Sure— Wednesday... I don’t have my L’s is that— fine?”

“We’ll put you in a parking lot at a time that no one else will be there for,” Wilbur says, “The police probably won’t arrest you if you’re with me... either way I have enough money for bail.”

“That is not putting any confidence in me!” Tommy shrieks.

Wilbur just grabs him, swinging his arm around Tommy’s shoulder as they both keep walking. Tommy’s noticed that Wilbur’s hugs have been— more frequent and with more ferocity since— well his heart stopped.

Somewhere in the back of his brain, the part that’s slightly nicer than everything else it says he should ask about it. But Tommy doesn’t want to push for something as small as that, that’s not something he needs to do.

Right now he’s happy to be hugged.

“I’m going to teach you everything I know!” Wilbur says excitedly, “Phil was the one who taught me to drive and he drives like he lives out in the country, I’ll show you all the shortcuts.”

“Legal... shortcuts, right?”

Wilbur just grins at him.

Oh boy.

Wednesday comes sooner than Tommy is expecting, and like no time has passed at all he’s sitting in a car. At the driver’s seat.

For what feels like the hundredth time that week he thinks, *oh boy.*

Tommy knows that Wilbur's car is reasonably nice, he's been in it enough times. It's a black car, an older *vintage* car with new seating that was put in not that long ago. There's a bit of chocolate wrapper Tommy ate in this car that they both missed when they were cleaning it out.

Still, Tommy is in the driver's seat, they've found a huge car park and it's about nine on a Wednesday night, so the car park is basically empty. They're not sure how explicitly *legal* this is, because Tommy technically hasn't done the test yet.

Now he's here.

This is a terrible idea.

He says as much.

"This is a terrible idea," Tommy says, "This car has no crumple zone."

"Just turn on the car."

"I'm going to kill us both."

"Maybe," Wilbur responds, he takes another obnoxious slurp out of the drink he's holding, "Then you would have done more damage than Eret and Elysium and that's impressive."

"Wilbur."

"It's just hard to kill me," Wilbur replies, "Should get some money from Elysium for it at least— think of the headlines '*Intern Thomas Underscore*' —"

“I’m not a fucking intern! Why does everyone think I’m a fucking intern, I am young— and underpaid for sure, but I am at least *paid* the tower doesn’t pay interns, you think I would put in this much effort to my job if I wasn’t getting paid? No.”

Wilbur just nods slowly.

“This car has no crumple zone!” Tommy says again, “Modern cars are meant to fuckin’ crumple so you— I dunno, don’t get brain damage. And you’ve already had enough of that.”

“First of all, this car isn’t *that* old that it doesn’t have a crumple zone. Second of all, I don’t have that much brain damage,” Wilbur murmurs, he crosses his arms and pouts staring directly out of the window in front of them. He sulks for a few more seconds before deciding that bullying Tommy is way more fun than that. “Anyway— stop being a coward and at least turn on the car.”

Tommy scowls.

He tries to turn the key.

“Other way.”

He turns the key the other way.

The car rumbles to life, it’s a lot quieter than Phil’s car, but still not the quietest car— Tommy does not want to be disrupting any babies in the area who are having the best nap of their god damn lives.

Tommy looks at Wilbur with wide eyes. “Now what?”

“Well, the mirrors are adjusted.”

“Yeah.”

“Your seat is adjusted.”

“Yeah, not all of us are freakishly tall.”

“You’re pretty fucking freakishly tall for a child,” Wilbur says, “You’re like taller than Techno.”

“I’m the same height as Techno.”

“Sure, whatever. Hit the accelerator.”

Tommy just looks at Wilbur, he is aware there’s something desperate in his eyes and Wilbur does not appear to be weak enough to break under it again. He just shakes his head slowly and Tommy opens his mouth.

“I’m going to kill us both.”

Wilbur doesn’t even dignify that with a response.

Tommy slowly puts his foot down on the accelerator.

The car lurches forwards and Tommy screams.

He slams his foot on the break.

Wilbur and Tommy both jerk forwards in their seats.

They both sit there for a few moments.

Wilbur stares out in front of him, “Oh boy.”

“Oh, boy,” Tommy repeats.

Wilbur takes a deep breath, “Okay, we’re not going to die if the car creeps forwards a little bit. You can do this. Foot on the accelerator, we’ll be going like— five kilometres an hour. Nothing’s gonna happen.”

Tommy nods.

He was Theseus for years.

And somehow him driving a car is the single most terrifying thing he’s had to do. Benjamin would tell him something about embracing a lack of control, something he never really has had to do before.

Does Tommy have control issues?

He should bring that up with Benjamin—

“Tommy,” Wilbur reminds, “You’re controlling a tonne of metal.”

“Don’t remind me!” Tommy screeches, and Wilbur just blinks at him dumbfounded for a few moments. “Alright, alright— I can do this, this is easy. This is fine.”

He puts his foot back on the accelerator, they don’t lurch forwards the same way they did last time rather just sort of... shuffling forwards. Tommy grips the wheel tighter looking at Wilbur with wide eyes.

“Eyes ahead,” Wilbur says, “Unless you’re actively trying to kill me.”

Tommy glances at the speedometer. It very clearly reads *2km/h* . “Can I even kill you at this speed?”

“Do you really want to find out?”

“A little bit,” Tommy admits.

Still, the car rumbles forwards and Tommy starts to get a feel for it. Until they— run out of room in the car park.

Tommy puts his foot on the brakes and Wilbur glances at him.

They both stare at the end of the car park.

“Alright... you now need to— turn around.”

“No.”

“Tommy.”

“Nope!”

“Hit the accelerator and turn the wheel, I have complete and utter faith in you.”

“I’m going to kill us.”

“You’re not going fast enough.”

“I’m gonna spin out and the car’s gonna flip.”

“If it does, you will need to break the laws of physics,” Wilbur says, “I’m here. I’m good at driving, I’ll grab the wheel if things go wrong. So grab onto the thing and turn it. You got this, I believe in you.”

Tommy looks at Wilbur, trying to put all the emotion in his eyes, “Wilbur. I am going to kill us.”

Then he hits the accelerator slightly, the car groans to life, and turns the wheel as hard as he can to the side. Wilbur yelps, but Tommy decides now is not the time to be worried about that, because the car slowly, slowly, *slowly* starts to turn.

And Tommy, who was one of the most feared vigilantes in Logstedchire, who possessed powers that had not been seen before, and control that was unmatched, Tommy who was (is) one of the most powerful people in L’Manberg—

Screams.

An ear-splitting scream as the car turns incredibly slowly.

Wilbur looks at him, concern on his face, then annoyance and then even more annoyance. He rolls his eyes and Tommy screams a bit louder, mostly just to piss off Wilbur.

Just when Tommy stops screaming and thinks he has a pretty good control over the car and what he's doing— that's when he almost runs into the wall.

Wilbur also screams that time, and Tommy slams on the brakes, and Wilbur puts the car in park.

They stare at each other for a moment, Tommy breathing heavily and Wilbur looking like he wishes he was left underneath that building.

“What the fuck, Tommy?” Wilbur takes a deep breath, massaging the sides of his temples and taking another deep breath. “Alright. You now get to put the car in reverse.”

“What? That's scary!”

“So is you almost running us into the wall!” Wilbur takes a deep breath, trying to calm himself, “Alright. Move the gear to the giant ‘R’, can't miss it. Then slowly, *slowly* turn the wheel to the right.”

Tommy just feels stressed.

So he nods, looking down at the gears, it's an automatic car— Wilbur probably paid a million dollars so it wasn't a manual car. Tommy nods and changes it to the giant ‘R’, the car beeps and Tommy puts his foot on the accelerator.

The car moves back slowly.

Tommy feels his shoulders relax.

Then he turns the wheel the way Wilbur said, and they straighten up so they're no longer facing the wall and instead facing the parking lot again.

Wilbur exaggeratedly gasps, putting his hands on his face as he looks at Tommy. "You did it!"

"Stop being condescending. You sound like you're from Dora."

Wilbur just responds with sticking out his tongue, like a mature adult would. Tommy flips him off— like a mature adult would.

"Well, you didn't crash the car. Try to drive to the other side and turn around."

Tommy does, he drives to the other side, and he effectively turns the car around *without* even needing to reverse this time.

Wilbur looks stressed the entire time that Tommy does this, gripping onto the dashboard like it's the only thing saving him from certain death. Or that with the dashboard Wilbur could magically gain control of the car.

Still, Tommy does it.

"Alright," Wilbur sighs, "That's enough."

"It was like five minutes."

“And I’ve aged five years from it,” Wilbur murmurs, “Get out of the front seat, we’re going home.”

“I’m basically an expert now,” Tommy decides, “I’ll drive us to Phil’s.”

“You did not go faster than ten kilometres an hour once.”

“A safe expert,” Tommy nods.

“You— do not have a licence?” Wilbur says slowly, “You will not drive us anywhere.”

"But Wil—"

"Why are you even arguing this? Get outta the seat."

Tommy huffs, getting out of the car, murmuring various swear words underneath his breath and Wilbur just gives him a very long, very Techno-esque expression as Tommy clambers into the other side of the car.

Wilbur nods approvingly, before starting the car off.

Tommy crosses his arms.

“Get your L’s and we’ll talk,” Wilbur says, “I’ll help you learn all the things— just— shit I’ll have to change my car insurance, the things I do for you Thomas Underscore.”

“You have the money.”

“It’s about the *effort* , I gotta call someone.”

“At your big age, you can handle it,” Tommy replies flatly.

Wilbur glares at him.

Tommy glares back.

“Raspberry’s gonna attack you when we get home.”

“I would like to see her try.”

“She’s specifically trained to attack annoying kids.”

“Why doesn’t she attack Daniel?” Tommy returns, he puts his feet up on the dash, only for a moment before Wilbur slaps him in the legs and Tommy puts his feet down, just glaring at Wilbur who shrugs at him.

“Because I like Daniel more than you.”

“You do not.”

“I do.”

“That’s just a lie, why are you lying to me?”

“Raspberry hates you,” Wilbur adds, glancing out his side mirror before flicking the indicator on, “She tried to bite your hair.”

“She tries to eat your hair all the time!”

“She does it to me out of love.”

“I hate you. So much. Genuinely.”

Wilbur just looks at him, shooting him a wide smile, a wide smile that Tommy half wants to slap off his face, but doesn’t because then Wilbur would probably crash the car, and Tommy has had enough trauma for several lives.

He looks back at the row, and Tommy huffs, sinking down in his seat. “I hate you.”

“You don’t,” Wilbur teases.

“I do.”

Wilbur doesn’t respond.

They get back to Phil’s, Tommy’s been spending more time here over the past couple of weeks. Getting in and out of Logstedchire is becoming nothing less than a nightmare to try and do, he doesn’t know how Techno does it most days.

Purpled is at Phil’s though, he’s leaning back on his seat, with a nasty black eye. Raspberry is on his lap. He glances up at Wilbur and Tommy and wipes his eyes. It doesn’t look like he’s been crying, but Purpled never looks like he’s been crying.

He always just kinda looks— sad.

“Hey,” Tommy says, “You alright?”

“Fine,” Purpled says, for what seems like the tenth time in five days.

Wilbur goes to sit near Raspberry, who is more than content to be friends with Purpled for now. She headbutts him in the hand once, and Purpled laughs at that.

Tommy goes to say more, making his way into the kitchen where he starts looking through for anything Purpled would like. He probably needs to eat more anyway and this doesn't hurt anyone.

Then there's a door swinging open and a heavy sigh, as the familiar footsteps of Phil walk towards them. He dumps his bag on the kitchen counter before turning around and facing the lounge area.

“You would not believe the day I had at work,” Phil says as he swings the door open, “First of all— hey Daniel,” his eyes skitter past Daniel and land on Wilbur. Before he realises, he looks back at Purpled. “What happened to you?”

Purpled snorts, “Some asshole punched me in the face.”

Phil's expression changes a little, he tilts his head, “Do you need me to do something about that?”

Purpled's lip curls up into a smile, and it seems a little bit twisted and almost sarcastic, Tommy opens his mouth to say something. “Just some asshole invigilator, don't worry about it. I'm fine.”

Tommy is getting the sense that Purpled is not fine, but Purpled gently puts Raspberry on the couch next to him, before scratching her underneath the chin. Then Purpled draws his hand away and he walks off.

All before Tommy can think of a word to say.

They all watch him go.

It's quiet for a long moment, before Phil starts talking about the day he's had, and by the time they all go to bed, Tommy's basically forgotten about the fact Purpled's having any struggles at all.

Tubbo has been working for twelve hours straight.

He thinks he's losing his mind.

Ranboo is sitting on a couch, eyes half-closed and listening to the rest of them talk, Aimsey's out— doing whatever the fuck Aimsey does in their spare time. Guqqie and Sniff are here, like they normally are.

Guqqie is laying flat on her back, looking up at the ceiling and occasionally handing papers to Tubbo when he asks for them. She's been talking about Critical Role for what feels like the past— forever.

“Then basically, there was this thing with a beacon.”

“This religious object right?” Sniff confirms, the only one actively following and asking questions.

“Yeah! And so they pulled off this heist with like... no planning, and it’s the only time literally anything has ever gone right for The Mighty Nein—mean I it’s probably gone right other times but this just went *so right* .”

“So— they planned a heist for an episode and a half and then—”

“It went incredibly wrong and then—”

Tubbo huffs, turning around in his seat and looking at Guqqie and Sniff, “Look— I am just as invested in this as the next guy, but I’m trying to do some *fucking work here*. ”

“You’d like Caleb,” Guqqie says thoughtfully, pointing at Tubbo, “Yeah— you’d for sure relate to the burn out gifted child. He’s a huge fucking nerd.”

“I don’t know what any of those words mean,” Tubbo turns back to his work, “Stop talking about Critical Role for five minutes, I am observing this blueprint. Takin’ notes, stop being a nerd.”

“Come on Tubbo, you’d like it so much.”

“You say that about literally all of your interests,” Tubbo responds flatly, “Sanders Sides was fine, you tried to get me to watch Voltron . ”

“And Adventure Time, and She-Ra.”

“She-Ra was alright,” Tubbo says, swinging back and forth in his chair a little bit, still not turning around to face the idiots he calls his friends. “I liked Entrapta— for a bit.”

“You fucking would,” Sniff mutters.

The door opens slowly, and in hobbles Aimsey. Aimsey is holding... far more in her arms than she should be. He has things stacked on top of each other, and manages to get to about the middle of the room before—

Everything drops on the ground.

They all stare at the things on the ground. “Sniff, Ranboo!” Aimsey whines, “Help me.”

So the pair of them get up from their spots on the various chairs and couches around in the room and start tidying up the papers. They collect them all, and Sniff complains that her back hurts the entire time.

Tubbo, once again, debates murder as a viable option.

He’s pretty sure it’s not.

But he thinks about it.

Sniff goes to sit back down again, Aimsey does too, the pair of them basically sandwiching Guqqie between them, as Guqqie shows Sniff something on her phone. Ranboo is looking at him, concerned.

Tubbo stares back at Ranboo.

“*You okay?*” Ranboo mouths, glancing at the other three but none of them are paying them any attention.

Tubbo nods, because he is.

Ranboo looks like they don't believe him, they open and close their mouth before realising if something is wrong (which it isn't) he's not going to get it out of Tubbo like this. So they relax back into the couch, scowling a little bit.

The silence is comfortable for a bit, as Tubbo runs over the plan for the millionth time, reading all the notes that they have. They have *piles* of them, and Tubbo is pretty sure he's had all of it memorised for— days.

Aimsey and Guqqie are talking about Adventure Time, because of course they are, and Tubbo feels out of his depth with whatever they're talking about. He can feel Sniff's confusion as they talk about it.

Ranboo is scrolling on their phone, laying on the ground but with his feet up on the couch. It's absent-minded, really, and Tubbo can't help but realise there's so much *domestic* about it all.

It reminds Tubbo of when it was him, Ranboo and Tommy in the apartment, when things were so much simpler and Tubbo was only slightly less scared for his life. But there's something calm about all of them sitting here for no reason.

They could go out into the lounge room, or they could move somewhere that isn't here. Yet, they're all sitting in arguably the worst room of the house, which is covered in papers and plans and a million tablets and monitors that flash and generally give everyone but Tubbo a headache.

It's... nice.

"Let's go out," Aimsey breaks the silence, "Tonight— I'll cover dinner and we can all— y'know, celebrate a little bit." Their eyes land on Tubbo for a long moment, before glancing at Ranboo. "You're familiar with the plan."

“Very,” Ranboo murmurs, “I had today off school and mentioned having stomach issues the day before, the groundwork has been fairly laid.”

Aimsey glances at Tubbo.

“I’ve downloaded a virus to an admin computer at my school that’ll change it to say I was there.”

“And you’re sure it works?”

“How do you think I’ve been getting so much time off to do this—” Tubbo gestures at the computer behind him, “I wouldn’t be relying on programs I haven’t used before for something like this.”

Aimsey nods. They open their mouth to speak again.

“We know the risks,” Tubbo says, holding a hand up, and Aimsey closes her mouth. “And we know you can’t do a lot if things go wrong— you and Sniff. We know we might get arrested, we know it might be messy.”

Ranboo nods.

Aimsey’s mouth presses into a thin line and she sighs, “Teleport in— get the information you need and get out, alright? Henry’s been basically out since the tower attack... you’ll be fine. Sam’s still working on him.”

“How kind,” Guqqie adds snidely.

“Incredibly,” Tubbo deadpans.

Tubbo knows the plan, he's read over it— reexplained it, rewritten it and spoken it over and over until it's stuck on his tongue. Ranboo teleport them in onto the fifth floor— they had no cameras there, sneak about wearing face masks, if anyone saw them talk about Tommy and trying to hang out with him and then abandon the mission because they couldn't drag Tommy into this.

He'd refused to drag Tommy into this.

Get up to the 74th floor, don't die, get all the information. Badabing badaboom. The cameras would be taken out by a convenient device that Tubbo had which would ideally scramble the communication system before they even got in.

Then Tubbo and Ranboo could say they got through while the cameras were down and security would probably be too stressed to be for sure.

It would be fine.

Tubbo stares down at his hands.

They are shaking a bit.

“Time to have some fun!” Aimsey throws their fists in the air and Tubbo finds himself smiling despite himself, “Holy shit— we should dress up, let's go dress up.”

And Tubbo gets dragged onto his feet by Aimsey and Sniff who are excited to wear offensively fancy clothes to go to a diner or some shitty restaurant, and Tubbo can't deny them this— he can't deny himself this.

Yeah, he might be arrested and awaiting a cell in Pandora's tomorrow.

But right now? Right now he has to put on clothes that are way too fancy and go to a shitty diner and eat shitty burgers.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter Summary

- TOMMY AND WILBUR GO TO THERAPY NOW!! EVERYONE CHEERED
- Anemoi get their plan mostly finalised after two months of working on it
- Purpled has a terrible day as Phil keeps on his quest to beat up vigilantes, Aimsey tries to arrest him and then Purpled kinda wins the fight because Aimsey has like NO training, then Purpled runs off like “my life is terrible and everything sucks”
- Techno, Wilbur, Purpled and Tommy go ice skating! Tommy sucks at it and also sulks about his lack of childhood
- Phil opens up about the man who raised him and how he kinda sucks, Tommy is like “UM TELL SOMEONE???” And Phil is like “nah bro.” and tommy doesn’t know how to feel about that
- Tommy learns how to drive! Thanks Wilbur!
- Anemoi decide to go out and celebrate at a shitty diner. (and privately, give Tubbo and Ranboo a potentially good memory before things MIGHT go pear-shaped.)

a/n: I REALLY ENJOYED WRITING THIS CHAPTER! Tommy learning to drive is based off me trying to learn how to drive and how done my dad was with me. Ice skating is based off of one of my friends who was honestly just terrible at ice skating and we had to cart her around for like two hours. My favourite thing is writing Purpled rn, because like... he’s gonna snap and it’s gonna be glorious.

I enjoyed writing fluff. There might even be more of it! Because y’all were like genuinely nice waiting for the last chapter and you should KEEP THAT UP.

play the pink panther theme boiz

Chapter Summary

“You got this,” Aimsey says.

A silence falls over the pair of them as they look up at the light polluted sky, staring at the occasional cloud and the way the moon shines through it.

In the silence, Tubbo almost lets himself believe Aimsey.

or, anemoi’s plans come to fruition

Chapter Notes

last time on tinaaos.... i think tommy tried to learn how to drive, went to therapy, there was a 6 month time jump and also anemoi decided they were going to take down william nelson-jones (the head of the hero committee) so... steal from his computer!

THIS TIME ON TINAAOS. read it. you'll find out.

Btw, I’m not really on “break” this is just the rate that chapters come out now. Cope I guess??? The three songs I listened to while writing this are: ‘Dear Icarus’ by Anna Miriam Brown, ‘Jort Storm’ by our boy charlie slimecicle and ‘I’m Gonna Kill Santa Claus’ by Danny Gonzalez. And considering what this chapter is... it’s a little bit hilarious.

Feel free to listen to Jort Storm while reading this chapter it will make it a lot funnier

Warnings: mentions and descriptions of weapons, some relatively minor blood and fighting, and some threatening and threatss ooooo

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tubbo is nervous. Everyone around him knows it— even Schlatt knows it, and Tubbo hasn’t specified *why*. He’s just been a nervous ball of energy for the last few days as the mission gets closer and closer.

Right now they’re supposed to be celebrating, Tubbo knows he’s supposed to be happy about the entire thing. He’s not. He’s so scared. He’s been scared before— he’ll certainly be scared

again, but he can barely think.

He doesn't want to get arrested.

It's not that he doesn't think he *couldn't* be fine if he got arrested, it's more that... he can't really wiggle his way out of it. Especially if it's a crime against William Nelson-Jones, the top dog of the entire fucking thing.

Around him people are drinking chilled apple juice, and all of them seem to be having a great time. It's also not them putting their freedom on the line. They've had talks about it, Sniff and Aimsey can't intervene no matter how much they want to. Guqqie has school and it would be no use to have her at the tower.

Just Ranboo and Tubbo.

But Ranboo can teleport, Ranboo has an out in *literally* every single situation they could ever get into. Tubbo doesn't have anything. If he gets stuck, he's stuck.

The others are chatting, they're happy. Tubbo is staring at the table, and every few seconds he sees Aimsey glance at him with concern. He can feel the night moving on, but he's stuck within his own brain just... replaying the plan.

Eventually Aimsey gets his attention, knocking on his head twice. That does make Tubbo look up from where he's staring at his empty apple juice glass.

"Yeah?"

"Wanna get out of here?" Aimsey asks, "just to get some air?"

Tubbo nods and is moving before he can even really process the word. He's following Aimsey out of the dining room to the balcony outside Tubbo's room.

It's cool outside, he can feel the night air on his skin and it feels nice.

The first thing Tubbo does is slide down against the wall so he's sitting, he takes a deep breath and puts his gaze on the ground.

"You'll be okay," Aimsey says gently, "you got this."

"I really do not," Tubbo mutters, he takes another deep breath before shaking his head and looking back down at the ground. "I— I'm scared."

"Nothing is going to happen to you," Aimsey sits down on the ground next to him. "I'd be a pretty shit leader if something did happen to you."

"Or I'd be a shitty soldier."

Aimsey knocks into Tubbo's shoulder with their own. "Don't call yourself a soldier— soldiers tend to be expendable. You're not expendable. Ranboo will be with you the entire way— you can call it off at any time, don't do anything stupid."

Tubbo just grunts.

"Look— if the choice is between some information and your freedom, take the freedom."

"I will," Tubbo snorts, "I think you think I'm a lot nobler than I am."

Aimsey smiles again, leaning against Tubbo slightly.

“Look,” Aimsey looks up at the sky, there’s no stars— there’s rarely ever any stars. It’s always light pollution or general pollution here. “I trust you for this— between you and me I don’t trust any of the others with this. You’re good— at what you do, and you’re just a good person.”

Tubbo snorts.

“You are, you don’t have a stake in this. I know you can get out of the country if you had to. The rest of us have stakes in this. I trust you with this Tubbo, you’ll make the right calls. You’re good at what you do, you’re good at this.”

Tubbo crosses his arms, hugging his legs closer to his chest.

“You got this,” Aimsey says.

A silence falls over the pair of them as they look up at the light polluted sky, staring at the occasional cloud and the way the moon shines through it.

In the silence, Tubbo almost lets himself believe Aimsey.

- - -

Purpled sits back on the edge of the building, he swings his legs as he eats the chips he’s been given. The protests are going alright, all things considered, he hasn’t had to step in yet. Which is always fun.

What is more fun is the poster boards with Theseus related things on them, it’s not that Purpled is offended by them, it’s that Theseus hasn’t been seen in six months, never defended a protest and never did anything for these people apart from beat the fuck out of a couple heroes a while ago.

He huffs, grabbing the knife from his side and flicking it out, he watches as people move through the streets. The protests kinda rise up a little more and then don't for a while— until people are reminded of the restrictions in Logstedchire and then they go for it again.

Overall, it's okay. He swings his feet back and forth as he finishes the chips and shoves the packet into his pocket.

For the first time in a while he starts categorising the injuries he's gotten over the past couple of weeks, he still has the fading bruise from Phil a bit ago. He also has several scratches across his arms and hands (that was just from a cat being a bitch.) Just to make sure everything's okay he starts pushing on various points on his ribs. Also nothing.

Nice.

His wrists have some lingering pain in them from punching and scrambling up onto tall objects. Overall, he's doing alright.

There's a noise on the street and Purpled sits up, hands clenching by his sides as he looks. It is indeed invigilators— because who else would it be? He groans, sighing before dropping off the side of the building.

(It is a little more complicated than that, involves more awkward shuffling down the building and praying he doesn't break his fucking ankles. He doesn't though!)

A protestor is swinging at the invigilator, who is just taking it with not a lot of thought. Purpled lands on the ground next to them.

“What the fuck did you do to Theseus?” The protestor screams, swinging wildly, kicking and punching and screaming. Their form is terrible though.

Purpled holds his breath for a few seconds, trying to calm himself down so he doesn't punch the invigilator and also the protestor. He wraps his arms around the protester— effectively

holding them back.

He gets elbowed in the chin and just sighs.

“Theseus is fine,” Purpled hisses, “this really is not why you should be fighting this guy.”

The invigilator’s hand ghosts by their side, and Purpled just looks at him.

“Try it,” he snarls.

The invigilator seems to think about trying it.

Purpled bit the inside of his cheek and glanced down at the gun by the invigilator’s side. He met the visor where the invigilator’s eyes should be. He just shakes his head slightly, grabbing the protestor and yanking them backwards slightly.

“Nope,” Purpled says, “Theseus is fine— he just retired.”

“You’re lying.”

“God I wish I was,” Purpled mutters, he pulls them backwards a little bit.

For a few more seconds he stares at the invigilator and the protestor, before letting them go and pausing for a few seconds. Neither of them move.

“Excellent,” Purpled mutters.

He then throws himself at the invigilator, knocking them on the ground where they land flat on their back. Some of the armour they're wearing cracking against the ground.

Purpled immediately goes for the radio at their side, he manages to grab it before throwing it to the side. There where it is, he throws one of his legs out and smashes the radio on the ground. The invigilator just stares at him for a few moments before going to swing upwards towards his face.

He manages to throw his head out of the way, moving underneath it and then swinging back at the invigilator.

The next thing was going for the gun on their side, which he then does. It's quite easy, all things considered. He flings that into the crowd before punching the invigilator across the face.

In return from that is a punch across the face and Purpled groans. He manages to throw himself out of the way before kicking the invigilator square across the jaw— who goes slumping into the ground.

With a deep breath, Purpled moves back, looking at the small group of protestors who have created a kind of circle around the pair of them. He shrugs at the rest of them, before turning around towards the closest alley.

He scrambles up the wall with more difficulty than he cares to admit, before flopping flat on his stomach on the roof.

Should Purpled be picking fights with invigilators? No.

Is he going to anyway? Yeah.

Purpled pulls off his mask, he takes a deep breath, spitting out blood and looking at his bloodied knuckles. With another deep breath he wiped his knuckles on his jumper, before

turning around and heading off back towards his apartment.

- - -

Tubbo wakes up, dragging himself out of bed the earliest he has in literal days. The sun isn't even out yet, when he gets out of bed, he knows he won't get much more sleep. He gets dressed into what they've decided to wear on this— potential fuck up of a mission.

Black. Plain black, attempting to hide as many features as possible, a black medical mask, gloves— of course the gloves, but the gloves were going to be tucked into a pocket somewhere else. It would look like what the security guards wore— just with a mask and gloves.

They could bullshit that they were sick if anyone asked about the masks.

He moves to the coffee maker, he's gotten a decent amount of sleep— considering that he could lose his freedom today. In front of the coffee maker is a small, yellow-iced cupcake. It doesn't have sprinkles on it, but Tubbo could cry anyway.

no one's left behind here.

- *with care, zephyrus*

Tubbo stares at the note for a few moments, he stares at it for a few more moments, then he puts it in his pocket. It's... something he doesn't have to do, it might trace back to Aimsey, but— it makes Tubbo feel a little less alone.

Tubbo finds himself shaking, his entire body can't stay still, like the electricity that keeps his body wants to explode out of him. So he paces around a little bit— then he tries to do exercise, before realising he is incredibly unfit.

Then he paces around some more.

And... like he does when things get complicated, he finds his way to the balcony at Schlatt's house.

Ranboo is already there, seemingly aware of what Tubbo's like and sometimes Tubbo wants to ask when Ranboo just started knowing him this well— was it in the fighting rings or after? Was it before or after Tommy came barreling into their lives with his stupid kindness and stupid baggage. Was it before or after Tubbo went back to school?

How do they know each other so well and Tubbo doesn't even know *when* that happened?

Tubbo crosses his arms, leaning against the railing of the balcony slightly. He sighs dramatically before running a hand down his face, managing a glance at Ranboo. Ranboo is leaning against the wall, arms crossed, eyes closed and head slightly tilted back in the night time breeze.

Out in front of them is the rest of L'Manberg, and Tubbo can see The Tower in front of them, it looms higher than most other things in the skyline, and is brighter than most other things there. Tomorrow they'll be there.

From where they are, they can hear the shouting though.

It feels a bit like that's all that happens now, shouting, throwing things, a lot of violence and bureaucracy and Tubbo is so tired of it. He thinks that's the general feeling in the area, exhaustion, because— this is exhausting.

Ranboo is very still, and Tubbo knows that means he's thinking. When Tubbo glances up at him, that's also proven. Ranboo is frowning slightly, they're rubbing their middle finger and thumb together—

“We could run, y’know,” Ranboo says, still looking straight ahead. “We don’t have to do this ___”

And Tubbo knows that, really, he knows that he has no reason to be here beyond a loyalty to a few people, some behind him in that house, and some across the city who mostly want very little to do with him.

He’s thought about it, isn’t that the kicker? He’s thought about leaving and running and leaving this dreadful place in the dust, telling Tommy where to find him if he’s needing and then leaving for a life that he *knows* will be better than this.

Tubbo doesn’t have any powers, beyond his— messed up brain and ability to befriend people so much more powerful than him. He’d fit right in somewhere else.

England? America? Canada— he likes the sound of Canada when compared to the other two options.

He wants to run.

“I know,” Tubbo says, “Maybe when this is all over we fuck off.”

“Yeah?”

“How’s Canada sound?”

“Awful.”

Tubbo laughs, “Yeah... I guess.”

Canada would probably be cold and filled with people with accents that Tubbo didn't like that much—

“Canada probably won't like the whole—” Ranboo gestures at their own face, the clear white and black split down the middle, “Hybrid thing.”

“Well, the other option is to fix the problem here,” Tubbo says, glancing at Ranboo again, who is also looking across the skyline. “Guess we're gonna try that then, huh?”

“Yeah,” Ranboo replies.

They're quiet for a long time, the sun is starting to climb up over the horizon and they both sit there in a silence that stretches into something slightly uncomfortable and concerned.

“Ready to try?” Ranboo asks.

Tubbo keeps his eyes on the sky for a few moments longer, the oranges and reds and pinks all melding together to make something beautiful and messy. The clouds are pink in this lighting, it's all beautiful, honestly.

“Fuck it,” Tubbo says.

The pair of them put their hoods up and shitty medical masks on their faces.

Tubbo then brushes more of his hair in front of his face, in front of his eyes. It might be a little more annoying to get around but he'd rather be annoyed than arrested.

Ranboo grabs onto Tubbo's shoulder.

Tubbo's familiar with the feel of Ranboo teleporting and his eyes snap shut as he lets himself feel Ranboo's hand on his shoulder.

They've done this hundreds of times— this one won't be any different.

Blood roars in his ears, as it gets colder around him.

Then his feet meet carpet, and it's a different type of cool— the fake artificial cool that Tubbo both loves and hates. He opens both of his eyes and Ranboo is still clutching onto his shoulder. They look a little bit queasy, but otherwise, alright.

Tubbo immediately looks around, they appear to be in some far off hallway. Tubbo can't actually hear anything, and with a quick glance around he sees that there aren't actually any cameras around him.

That's... a relief.

Odd, but a relief.

There's no windows here either, and Tubbo immediately crouches down, dragging Ranboo onto the floor with him. Ranboo makes a noise as they hit the ground, smashing their head against the wall.

That also makes the both of them pause.

Tubbo is quiet for a few moments, listening intently for any noise around them. Any sign that anyone would have any feelings about this entire thing.

Then he hears a voice a few rooms down.

Ranboo and Tubbo pause completely.

Tubbo pushes against the wall, back flat against it as he looks at Ranboo.

“Yeah?” he hears Tommy in the other room.

Shit.

Tubbo looks at Ranboo with wide eyes— it’s not that this is the worst situation, it’s surely up there though. Tommy’s nearby... did Ranboo even teleport him onto the fifth floor? Or is there another blind spot they’ve just happened to land in.

He looks around again, eyes darting about for any cameras. There aren’t any, thankfully. It is indeed just a long hall, with doors everywhere. Tubbo can vaguely assume that anything useful is down the hall.

Issue. Tommy is only a few doors up.

Walking past would very easily alert them to where the pair of them are. Which means... they have to just... sit still for a little bit.

Then Tubbo grabs Ranboo by the arm and drags the pair of them back into a room. The door swings open mostly quietly, and they stumble in there.

It’s an office of some kind, it looks pretty chill all things considered. There’s a desk, a wooden door and a window that probably can’t be broken if they need to make an escape. Tubbo huffs and crouches back down.

“Okay?” Tommy’s voice comes from down the hallway, slightly muffled down the hallway.

“You require so much from me,” Tommy sighs, he whacks the printer one more time for good measure, “the printer on our floor needs more ink by the way. The accountants used it all.”

“Cool. Bye.”

It’s quiet for a few moments.

“Oi,” Tommy’s voice yells down the hall, “how much can I pay you to get some printer ink?”

Tubbo looks at Ranboo, dragging them back into the room slightly more. He shakes his head. They both stay silent.

“Tommy,” a voice speaks behind him, and Tommy in all honesty jumps.

Tubbo immediately has the gun by his side, he holds his breath and drops onto the ground so his centre of gravity is lower.

“You brought a gun?” Ranboo hisses at him.

“You didn’t?” Tubbo returns.

“You brought a *gun*?”

“You *didn’t*?”

They both stare at each other.

Tubbo peers his head around the door carefully.

Sam Warren is standing at the end of the hallway with his arms crossed, Tommy is also standing there, but his back is to Ranboo and Tubbo. Meaning the risk is Sam seeing them. More notably, Sam is holding something.

Tubbo whips back around, hiding behind the wall again and taking a deep breath.

Ranboo just pulls a face at him.

Slowly Tubbo finger spells 'S-A-M' out to Ranboo who pales.

It's quiet for a long moment moment as Tommy just seems to stare at Sam, like all his thoughts had shot out of the back of his head and disappeared, scattering onto the wall like nothing else.

"Sam..." Tommy says, "what are you doing up here?"

"Looking for you actually," Sam says easily, his voice sounds very... breezy and light, almost too casual. Sam smiles and it's a bit too full for it being seven in the morning, "I was wondering if you could help me out with something."

"Uh—" Tommy takes a step back.

Ranboo is starting to shuffle forwards, despite Tubbo's looks clearing saying *'do not fucking try this you stupid motherfucker I'm going to kill you and make you dead. You complete fuck do not even—'*

"I have to go do a thing for Phil," Tommy says, "maybe Bella can help you? She's better with all the tech stuff, last time I helped you out I passed out."

Tommy lets out the most awkward laugh that Tubbo has ever heard from him.

“It’ll be quick,” Sam says.

Ranboo gives Tubbo a look, “that man is talking like a murderer,” Ranboo hisses.

“What the fuck do we do?” Tubbo returns, just as sharply, “Sam could be holding anything.”

“He’s holding something and threatening our friend?”

“Our friend is one of the most powerful people in L’Manberg,” Tubbo returns, “he can handle himself. We have a job to do—”

“It’s just quick, Tommy,” Sam says and he sounds like a fucking supervillain as he says it and Tubbo hates that fact even more.

“I’m good,” Tommy responds. “I’m so good actually— I really have to do this thing for Phil.”

There’s a shuffle of movement up the hallway.

Ranboo rips the medical mask off and then also takes off his hood, unzipping the jacket to reveal the relatively normal t-shirt underneath it.

“Ranboo—”

And like that, Ranboo walks out of the room into the hallway.

And like that, Tubbo claps his hand over his mouth to stop himself screaming and he buries his head into the crook of his elbow as he tries not to start screaming again. He takes a deep breath, breathing through the fabric to try and calm himself down.

Okay. Ranboo has just jeopardised the mission.

Sure.

Great.

Fantastic, even. Someone could call this fantastic. Tubbo isn't going to call this fantastic but someone might. Tubbo took another deep breath, still breathing mostly into his arm, and picking up the mask Ranboo had thrown on the ground and shoving it in his pocket.

This was *so* fine.

Not even jeopardised , he'd just fucked the entire thing up.

Now Tubbo *knew* he was trained for this. He had been since he was a child— in an ironic way this is kinda the thing his parents had in mind for him when he was young. Tubbo puts his head against the wall, just leaning it.

Alright. What does Tubbo have on him? He has a spare mask, he has a lockpick and a couple of napkins stuffed into his pockets. He has a gun and enough ammo that this should be okay. He doesn't want to shoot someone but he totally would.

Tubbo takes a deep breath.

Okay.

Sure. He's doing this alone.

He looks out of the window in the office, they're maybe on the tenth floor. Right. That was not the goal even slightly. He leans his head against the wall again. For a few moments he debates the entire fucking purpose of his life.

Right. Okay.

With a deep breath, he stands up straighter, checking the gun in his hands. Before grabbing the knife out and spinning it in his hand. It's just a box cutter, but Tubbo knows how to do enough damage with it.

"Fuck me," Tubbo mutters, mostly to himself.

He hits his head against the wall one more time, just to make himself feel slightly better about the situation.

From here he kind of knows where to go. He remembers the plan... climb up the stairs until the 70th floor. There he gets into the elevator that doesn't connect to the other systems, fully for that system. There are stairs but that requires a keycard, and a keycard is not something Tubbo wants to try and achieve.

The elevator has nothing, which seems like a design flaw but Tubbo's willing to move past it.

Now... Tubbo just needs to climb up 65 stories worth of stairs.

For a moment, a long... tiring moment, Tubbo debates turning around and figuring out how to become a squid. Then he takes another deep breath, it's not like this is the only chance they have trying to do this— since Ranboo's abandoned mission to save Tommy.

He takes a deep breath.

He can do this.

As quietly as possible, he slips out of the door. He looks over his shoulder for a few moments, waiting to see Sam Warren jump out at him like a bad horror movie villain. Instead it's largely quiet.

Without another thought, Tubbo starts down the hallway, he hides his gun away like a normal person. While he'll try his luck with a lot of things... this is not one.

With relative ease he manages to find his way towards the stairwell, turns out memorising blueprints is useful.

The process of clambering up the staircase is long.

It's tiring.

Tubbo is tired.

Every time he almost thinks he's there, there's more stairs.

No one takes the stairs in this building— and for clearly good reason. As he climbs higher the stairs get slightly more damaged, clearly from the attack a couple months back. He almost gets deja vu from clambering up these stairs.

He's in a different stairwell this time, so that's fine.

Eventually he sees the big 70 on the door, and he lets out a sigh of relief. Then in complete honesty takes about ten minutes to fucking catch his breath. He's a programmer nerd, he is not built for exercise.

With a tired huff, he swings the door open with his shoulder.

Realising his mistake as soon as he does it, he freezes.

By some miracle of— something there's no one in this foyer area. He pauses by the door for a few moments just looking. It's completely empty, there's some scaffolding and the sign that there are still repairs on this floor.

Opposite the stairwell door there is a long hallway with several doors that probably lead to relatively small offices. To the left are two large elevator doors and to the right is a more open area that is probably a common area.

Peeking further out he can't see anyone in that area.

This floor is... concerningly empty. For good measure he gets his knife out, clutching it by his side.

Carefully he sneaks over to the elevator.

Not too far away is the humming of a printer, he can't hear anyone in that room but that doesn't mean they're not there. It's relatively early in the morning, there won't be many people here. Tubbo supposes he has to use that to his advantage.

He knows this is the only way up to the other floors.

This is basically his only shot.

He presses the button on the elevator.

“You do not have clearance for that,” a robotic voice says to him.

Shit.

Henry. That fucking AI.

Of course they had *a* security measure for the elevator, what sort of idiot wouldn’t— and now Tubbo is the even bigger idiot because he is now stuck here.

Tubbo’s stomach drops and he pauses, then he crouches on the floor as he looks up at the ceiling. The ceiling is not where Henry is— Henry is in the entire fucking building. He shuffles behind a rather large plant just in case.

He can’t hear any movement, like anyone has even noticed or even cares.

Tubbo pauses for a few moments before sighing deeply.

1. It’s always the fucking AI.

The thing about AI is that it’s pretty stupid sometimes— there are ways to get around it, and Tubbo knows that in the back of his brain, but right now he’s standing at a doorway he should not be able to get into.

Tubbo looks up at the ceiling.

Ideas. Ideas.

AI is stupid, AI can't rationalise things the same way humans can. They're just... not capable of it, and depending on where Henry started to get his knowledge from there are different ways around it. He doesn't know what data set Henry was based on—

Shit.

Not good.

He needs an idea here—

“I will be forced to alert Sam Warren if you—”

And like that, an idea hits him.

Sam Warren.

“Hey... Henry...” Tubbo says slowly, “respond to commands like I'm Sam Warren.”

A moment of silence, “of course.”

Tubbo's shoulders relax and he stumbles towards the elevator. “Henry— go to floor— seventy-four, please.”

“Of course.”

The elevator doors open and Tubbo ducks in.

It's a relatively normal looking elevator, all things considered, stainless steel walls that are cleaner than the few others Tubbo has seen during his time here. He

He lets out a deep breath and runs a hand down his face. He checks that he still has his gun and knife— he does. With another deep breath, he relaxes his shoulders.

- - -

Tommy hates coming into work early.

He does it every now and again, mostly because of train times and when he has a particular chunk of work to do. Today he has a particular chunk of work to do— a call about an interview and then a meeting with Quackity's PR people.

There's so much work that goes into this entire hero thing it's ridiculous. The amount of accountants this place has is *ridiculous*. General rule in the heroes tower, if you want to figure out who someone is— there is a 50% chance they're an accountant.

Accountants. Tommy's new worst enemy.

The accountants keep using all the printer ink too.

Which leads Tommy to where he currently is, which is beating the shit out of a printer and hoping for the best. He's pretty sure if he whacks it enough it's going to have enough ink and *yes* he can go to another floor but at this point it's pride stopping him.

There's a noise at the door and Tommy looks up.

It's quiet for a few moments. Then Tommy hears a thump across the other side of the hallway. He pauses for a few moments. That is a weird noise to hear in this part of the building—the training floors are downstairs.

He glances at his phone, no one is supposed to be training right now.

His phone rings and the contact photo of Phil comes up, it's a dumb photo of Phil from a while ago. It's him looking heartbroken after dropping a cake on the ground which then exploded and icing got everywhere.

“Yeah?” Tommy says.

“Aimsey's training.”

“Okay?”

“I need you to talk to them about the press conference they wanna run with Aimsey and Techno.”

“You require so much from me,” Tommy sighs, he whacks the printer one more time for good measure, “the printer on our floor needs more ink by the way. The accountants used it all.”

“I'll tell someone.”

“Cool. Bye.”

Tommy huffs, and hangs up the phone. Honestly, people these days can't even keep their printers with ink cartridges in them. He sets his shoulders and walks out of the room, down the long hallway.

To his side he hears a noise that makes Tommy pause again.

It's similar to the noise earlier, he squints and turns his head to the side.

"Oi," Tommy yells down the hall, "how much can I pay you to get some printer ink?"

There's silence down the hall.

Now. Tommy hasn't acted as Theseus for months. He knows that some of his instincts have died a little bit, and he knows that he's not as quick as he used to be. But this is a fucking red flag. He pauses for a few seconds.

Tommy starts walking down the hallway, hands in fists by his side.

Is he paranoid after people broke into the tower?

Yes.

Does he want to deal with this later? No. He spent months figuring out how to tighten security he's not going to do this—

"Tommy," a voice speaks behind him, and Tommy in all honesty jumps.

Sam.

Fantastic. As if Tommy's day couldn't get worse, he had to come into work early, has a meeting with Quackity's PR people the printer has no ink and now Sam is also here. Tommy grits his teeth, deciding a fight would not be the best move today.

More alarmingly, Sam is holding something clutched tightly in his hands, Tommy can't see what it is, it's completely hidden but Tommy notes it. Unless Sam is very angry (which maybe) most people do not just casually hold their hands around like that.

Tommy's eyes flicker back up at Sam and he takes a few steps backwards.

"Sam..." Tommy says, "what are you doing up here?"

"Looking for you actually," Sam says easily, his voice sounds very... breezy and light, almost too casual. Sam smiles and it's a bit too full for it being seven in the morning, "I was wondering if you could help me out with something."

"Uh—" Tommy takes a step back.

Sam doesn't move from his spot, his arms are just crossed and he just looks down at Tommy.

"I have to go do a thing for Phil," Tommy says, "maybe Bella can help you? She's better with all the tech stuff, last time I helped you out I passed out," he laughs and he knows it's fake.

Sam knows it too.

"It'll be quick," Sam says.

"Uh— no thanks."

"It's just quick, Tommy," Sam say.

“I’m good,” Tommy responds. “I’m so good actually— I really have to do this thing for Phil.”

“Tommy—” Sam moves forwards.

There’s a crash down the hallway, and Tommy looks over his shoulder to see... Ran-fucking-Boo walking up towards them, an awkward smile on his face as he approaches.

“Hey,” Ranboo says, like Tommy’s brain hasn’t shot out of the back of his head, “there’s no ink cartridges in the office. We’re gonna have to look somewhere else.”

“W— what?” Tommy says.

Here’s the thing. Tommy’s pretty good at dealing with weird situations, his entire life is several weird situations after several weird situations. But Ranboo being... in the tower... with no explanation and almost perfectly defending him from Sam is... the weirdest thing in the world.

And it’s not like Ranboo and Tommy have been talking a bunch, because... they haven’t. Tubbo and Tommy have been trying to catch up since Tommy quit being Theseus— but Ranboo and him just haven’t been talking that much.

Which is fine... it just... doesn’t explain any of this.

Why the fuck is Ranboo here?

Tommy stares at Ranboo for a few seconds, and Ranboo doesn’t hesitate to wrap an arm around Tommy’s shoulders, a clear sign of ‘fucking try me’ to Sam. Sam could very well try them.

Sam just looks between the two of them with a disapproving look, before huffing and walking away.

“Why the fuck— what the fuck— why are you here?” Tommy hisses.

“Don’t ask,” Ranboo replies, starting to drag Tommy down the hallway, away from the direction they came. “Seriously— it’s for your own good.”

“What the fuck?”

Ranboo just holds his shoulders tighter, “welp— where are we going?”

“I— what?”

Ranboo drags Tommy into the elevator and looks at all the buttons, screwing their face up at all of them. Tommy, on auto-pilot, slams his hand on the button to the training room. They both look at each other.

The elevator ride is long and awkward, Tommy has too many questions and Ranboo is dodging questions like their life depends on it. So Tommy figures to just leave it, and he looks at his phone instead of trying to make conversation.

After the elevator they walk towards the training room.

It’s not a very long walk, but Ranboo jumps at every shadow and puts his head down whenever literally anyone passes by.

“Why are you being nervous?”

“Heroes freak me out.”

“We haven’t even passed any.”

“Accountants scare me.”

Tommy considers that for a moment, “fair.”

The pair of them find their way to the training room, a place he’s been before but not for a while.

They’ve gotten new mats, along with some padding on the walls because— people keep getting thrown into the walls. There’s some standing punching bags, along with some target practice. On the back wall is a new weapons stand with all kinds of melee weapons that look various levels of pointy and painful.

Aimsey is standing in the middle of the mat, currently attempting to fight off two security guards who have clearly been dragged into this, their hair falls in front of their face as they spin around, hitting one of them with the wooden staff in his hands before whirling around and swinging at the other one.

Xe looks over at Tommy and Ranboo and her eyes go wide.

He gets whacked in the face, and Aimsey smacks into the ground. It sounds vaguely painful and Tommy winces.

The security guards they were fighting stopped, just standing there for a few seconds.

“Who’s uh— who’s that?” Aimsey asks, looking at Ranboo, “did you bring a friend or something? Um... hello, I’m Aimsey.”

“Ranboo,” Ranboo responds with a tilt of their head, “my name’s Ranboo.”

“That’s so cool,” Aimsey mutters, eyes wildly switching between Ranboo and Tommy. They settle on Tommy and then land on Ranboo again, then rip away from Ranboo and land back on Tommy.

Now, Tommy isn’t the most observant person in the world but there is something going on... and he doesn’t know how to feel about it in complete honesty. He looks between the two of them before glancing at one of the security guards standing on the mats.

She seems to have the same assessment of the situation, and is awkwardly looking between Ranboo and Aimsey like it’s a tennis match.

Tommy looks at Aimsey again.

Aimsey looks at him.

Ranboo just kinda stands there awkwardly.

“Do you two know each other or something?”

“Nope,” Aimsey says, “never seen them before in my life.”

Ranboo nods, “yeah— not once. You said you’re... Aimsey?”

“Mhm.”

“Never met them before,” Ranboo adds with a helpful nod.

“Uh— alright?” Tommy looks between the two of them, “Ranboo, why are you actually here? I mean you just came out of nowhere—”

“Uh—” Ranboo looks at Aimsey for some reason, “Aimsey’s... girlfriend... sent me here. Yup, Aimsey’s girlfriend sent me a message to pass along. Since Aimsey can’t talk to them.”

“Yes,” Aimsey says, “the girlfriend that I do have. The girlfriend that I for sure have, I have one of those currently.”

Tommy just squints at Aimsey, “I’m kinda getting the vibe you don’t have a girlfriend.”

“Are you being homophobic? Why else would Ranboo be here?” Aimsey laughs, wrapping an arm around Ranboo— “I totally have a girlfriend. That is a thing I have.”

The aim is around the shoulders, but Aimsey is too short for that, so Ranboo uses Aimsey’s head like an armrest. Aimsey glares up at Ranboo who just grins, before the both of them look back at Tommy.

“Wait— so why were you sent here?” Tommy asks, “I feel like there are easier ways—”

“When have I done anything easy,” Ranboo adds, “but yeah— uh— I’m friends with... the girlfriend that Aimsey totally has and since I know you I figured I could get in here easier... y’know with the security changes.”

Tommy looks at Aimsey.

He looks at Ranboo.

Tommy doesn't know Aimsey that well, but he knows Ranboo well enough. He looks at Ranboo for a long moment—

It's just them being awkward.

“Fair enough,” Tommy shrugs, “wait— did you sign in at the front desk or teleport in?”

“Uh... um,” Ranboo says.

“All good, we'll just sign you in with Kristin now. She loves me— don't worry about it.”

“Really?” Ranboo asks.

“All good,” Tommy waves his hand, “c'mon, we'll go find Kristin. Aimsey— you good up here?”

“Did you need me for something?”

“Oh yeah,” Tommy huffs, “basically they want you and Techno to do an interview about the whole process of training under Techno. They're probably going to try and catch you out and imply Techno can't mentor Sniff and you at the same time but that is just wildly untrue and you can bring up that Philza mentored two heroes over the span of his career— like three times.”

Aimsey nods slowly, “is that all?”

“Maybe,” Tommy shrugs, “I'll forward any emails to your people— text Techno anything super important. Phil just wanted me to let you know.”

“Is your job always this boring?” Aimsey asks, “you just walk around asking people things?”

“Yup.”

Tommy grabs Ranboo and starts dragging him away, “we’re getting him signed in.”

Aimsey runs towards the edge of the mat, managing to put her shoes back on as they stumble all around— almost landing flat on their face. Ranboo manages to keep them upright, and Aimsey puts their shoes back on.

“Techno wants me anyway,” Aimsey says, “important business on the SBI floor that I was ignoring.”

“Important?” Tommy repeats, “what the fuck?”

“Just training,” Aimsey replies, as they turn down the hallway towards the elevator. “Something about power control or whatever— they don’t want a second Theseus.”

Tommy and Ranboo give each other a Look™ as Tommy decides the wall is incredibly interesting as Ranboo presses the button for an elevator. The wall is so very interesting... with it’s... white clinical colour.

After a few moments of awkwardness one of the elevator doors open.

“It’s uh... nice to meet you Ranboo who I have never talked to or met before,” Aimsey says.

“You too Aimsey... who I have also never met or talked to before today.”

Tommy side eyes the both of them, but Ranboo has run into the elevator before he can say anything about it.

He follows after Ranboo into the elevator, and a slightly uneasy silence falls over the pair of them.

Ranboo stands very still in the elevator, their arms are crossed and it looks like they're thinking. While Ranboo thinking in itself isn't particularly rare, the expression they have on their face as he does it.

He's tapping his foot and staring intensely at the wall. Like somehow the wall did something.

"Do you know what Sam was holding?" Ranboo asks.

Tommy just looks at him, "huh?"

"When you were talking to him," Ranboo continues, "he was holding something."

"Yeah um... no clue. He's kinda been freaking me out recently," Tommy confesses, "just bad energy."

"Murder energy?"

"I mean— kinda, yeah," Tommy says, "I think that's just how he is."

"Murder?"

"Well I don't think he's actually killed someone."

“*Think?* That’s something you want to be sure about Tommy.”

“I mean, Tubbo gives murderery vibes,” Tommy defends.

Considering Ranboo goes quiet, and seems to think harder, Tommy knows he has a point there. Tubbo *is* incredibly murderery, as far as Tommy’s aware Tubbo’s never killed anyone. Which is hilarious because both Ranboo and Tommy have killed people...

Maybe not hilarious.

That might not be the right word for it.

Before Tommy can open his mouth to point out how Tubbo is the murderery one despite his lack of murdering, the elevator doors open.

Ranboo walks out, still seemingly thinking hard.

Tommy runs out, because Ranboo does not (and shouldn’t?) know the way to Kristin’s office. It’s a relatively short walk, passing a bunch of other important places. Head of PR, head of accounting (Tommy hates that guy). Before reaching a familiar door.

The door is one that Tommy has entered a lot— yes, because he annoys Kristin a lot. The door has Kristin’s name and title on the door. *Kristin Mors - Head of Security* on a little golden plaque on the door.

He swings the door open.

“Hi,” Tommy says, “your favourite emotional support teenager is here.”

The office is a relatively nice one, there's a bookshelf on the left wall, and a desk in the middle of the room. There's also a longer table behind Kristin with a bunch of monitors and various cameras across the tower.

It's kind of like Five Nights at Freddy's, and now Tommy is curious if this is a horror game.

There's an absurd amount of plants around this room, Tommy's pretty sure she's added three more plants since last time he was here... and Tommy was here yesterday.

At the desk is Kristin, she's tapping on the desk, focusing on something on her computer.

"Hello," Kristin responds, looking up from her computer.

"Hi," Tommy grabs one of the spare chairs, swinging it around so he's sitting on the other side of Kristin's desk, "this is my mate Ranboo. He didn't sign in, can we sign them in now?"

She looks at Ranboo, glancing at him.

"How did you get in here?"

"Teleported," Ranboo murmurs, "I have minor teleportation powers... I'm okay."

Tommy raises an eyebrow at Ranboo, they both fully know there's nothing minor about it. Kristin seems to catch this because she also looks amused. She leans forwards.

"May I ask why that is?"

“Oh, uh— basically—” Ranboo starts. They shuffle back and forwards on their feet. “I’m uh, friends with Aimsey. I was uh—”

There’s the sound of an alarm, and Tommy jumps, whirling around and grabbing onto Ranboo’s wrist. Ranboo looks unimpressed as hell and shakes Tommy’s grip off.

Kristin also jumps, spinning around on her spinny chair and pushes herself towards the table with the monitors on it. Tommy also looks for something on those monitors and doesn’t find it— Kristin also doesn’t find whatever she’s looking for and she whirls back around.

The phone on her desk rings and Kristin holds it up to her ear.

Tommy can only hear vague frantic s

“Alright. Lock it down,” Kristin says, “get the closest heroes on it—”

Kristin slams the phone back down and looks up at Ranboo. Eyes narrowed.

Tommy’s not even the one being looked at and he feels incredibly seen and judged.

“There’s a security breach on floor 74,” Kristin says, eyes still boring into Ranboo.

“Huh?” Tommy asks, “what does that mean?”

“Someone got up to William Nelson-Jones floor... someone sounded the alarm.”

“I hate that guy anyway,” Tommy waves his hand, “hopefully they’ve fucking killed him.”

“Tommy.” Kristin grits her teeth, “that is a real possibility and you are implicating yourself.”

“God I want to—”

Kristin raises an eyebrow, looking at Ranboo. “Why are you here— coincidentally just before a break in happens on the top floor?”

Ranboo gulps, “sorry ma’am, I was— passing a message along to Aimsey from her girlfriend.”

Kristin looks decently surprised at that, “He has a girlfriend?”

“Mhm.”

“Could I get a name?”

“Guqqie Willows,” Ranboo says, “the logic was I could get in because I knew Tommy— I didn’t know about the new security changes, I used to teleport into the building a lot.”

“Wait, what—” Tommy starts.

Kristin just raises a hand in a ‘shut the fuck up’ gesture, which Tommy takes and he huffs, crossing his arms as he looks between Ranboo (incredibly nervous) and Kristin (incredibly suspicious.)

“And will this Guqqie Willows corroborate your story?”

“Mhm,” Ranboo squeaks, “sorry ma’am.”

“It’s just Ranboo,” Tommy waves a hand in Ranboo’s direction, “they’re about as dangerous as a penguin. He can just teleport and even then he’s pretty fucking bad at it.”

“I am not—”

Kristin’s gaze settles on Tommy for a few moments, before she sighs and looks at one of the screens on her desk. “I have bigger concerns than either of you, it’s possible the leader of our organisation is being assassinated as we speak. You’re fine to go Ranboo— you’re fine to go Tommy, just please do it properly next time we have high security for a reason.”

Ranboo nods, before scrambling out of the room like their life depends on it.

Tommy watches him go, before looking back at Kristin, “sorry about him— they get nervous around anyone with the vaguest sense of authority.”

“Get out,” Kristin snaps.

“Alright! Alright! Sheesh! Hope he’s fucking dead.”

Tommy slips out of the room, quickly shutting the door behind him. Muffled through the door he hears Kristin go “*Thomas*” but Tommy is running towards Ranboo.

Ranboo in the few seconds that Tommy hasn’t been there has sat himself in the lobby with his heads between his knees as they just stare at the ground. Tommy looks over his shoulder — what the fuck is happening.

People around the lobby are running, lots of them with phones to their ears screaming things into their phones. The front doors have been closed and there is a small barricade of security guards standing by the door.

ourple:
you good?

toh mii:
u working?

ourple:
no, the group chat is exploding though
Something about a security breach

toh mii:
literally anymore info would be great

ourple:
I have none you fucker.

Tommy stares at his phone for three seconds.

ourple:
oooo janice has some details, aimsey and techno are apparently on it

Tommy looks at that for a few more seconds before sighing in relief, two of the most capable people in the tower are handling— whatever this is, and after last time Techno is not going to let any security breach go by unhandled.

“We’re alright,” Tommy says, looking over at Ranboo who is taking deep breaths, “Aimsey and Techno apparently have it handled.”

“Oh...” Ranboo trails off, looking to the side, they sound strained, “excellent...”

- - -

Fred is just a guy. He wakes up, he does his work. He goes to sleep, he doesn't think too hard about the moral implications of working for arguably one of the most evil people in the entire world... that's too much for now.

He just got out of uni, he has like three dollars to his name.

The thing about Fred is that he's neither good or bad at his job, he's just fine at it, he's not particularly memorable. He quite likes it that way.

So when the elevator opens, Fred looks up because... *that's weird.*

Standing in the elevator is a boy who looks very much like he doesn't belong here. He's wearing a mask and all black, with bits of brown hair peeking out from underneath his hood. More alarmingly he's holding both a knife and a gun.

Fred opens his mouth to say anything like: *'hey what are you doing with a knife'* or *'you're not supposed to be here'* or even something as controversial as *'unless you're going to find the papers get out.'*

Instead, he's just stared at for a few seconds, then the boy lunges at him.

"Go to sleep, go to sleep," he says.

Fred... isn't particularly strong, he's just an average dude. This guy must be strong because Fred can't manage to get away from him. Instead an arm is wrapped around Fred's neck and squeezes.

Everything goes fuzzy— which is weird, he knows that his breathing is fine, which wouldn't be the case if he was being choked... that's odd. His eyes roll back and everything fades to

black.

- - -

Okay, Tubbo didn't exactly want to strangle that guy, but what's done is done he guesses. He reaches to his side, pulling out a very useful bundle of rope and tying this guy's hands together because he is *not* dealing with any of this.

He looks at the guy for a second, he's wearing a nametag like a complete fucking loser. Tubbo looks at the guy for a few more moments. Fred. His name is Fred. Who fucking calls themselves Fred?

Tubbo just watches him for a few more moments, before huffing and turning around. Fucking. *Fred*. Like— if you work for arguably the worst person alive don't make your name fucking Fred. Go by Fredrick or something.

He steps over *Fred* .

The room itself is... pretty fucking basic, it's just a very large room. There's a desk towards one of the windows, as the hero tower tapers off the higher it gets, this is still too big for an office, but not ridiculously so. There's a few rooms to the side, Tubbo doesn't care to look at them.

He stalks forwards towards the desk, holding the USB by his side.

The desk is... reasonably desk-ish, there's a bunch of small plants on it. Tubbo, being petty as fuck knocks them all off the desk where they shatter against the ground. He feels bad for the plants, then he gets over it.

He swings into the chair without any trouble, squinting at the computer.

It needs a password.

The one thing they fucking didn't think of.

A password.

Tubbo actually facepalms, he is the smartest dumbass in the entire world. For a few moments he debates every decision he's ever made leading him to this point. And at this point he's in too far to get out of this—

He looks to his left.

Sitting on the desk right next to him is a notebook, the page is *open* to a list of passwords for various things.

If this was a movie the writer would be praised for lazy writing and knowing nothing about computers. Thankfully it's not a movie, and people are just that stupid. He picks up the notebook and flicks through it.

There are Google and Microsoft accounts along here— along with Tinder— Tubbo doesn't want to think about that longer than he has to.

Using the password Tubbo manages to get into the computer.

For a few seconds he just stares at the computer in front of him... here it is, everything he's worked for for the last couple of weeks. The place that may or may not have the secrets to taking this guy down.

He then plugs in the USB he has to the side of the computer (it takes a few goes honestly), then he does the mature thing and copies all the documents into the USB that he can get his grubby little hands on.

There's a lot.

It's supposed to take a while.

So Tubbo looks back over at *fucking Fred*.

Out of sheer boredom Tubbo starts looking at some of the files he's copying onto this USB.

There's a rather unassuming file, just something that looks like a PNG of something, which is odd considering there aren't any other PNG files in this

He clicks on it.

The image opens, staring right in front of them is... what looks like a cheque of some kind. It's addressed to someone named 'Eret', Tubbo... doesn't think he knows anyone called Eret. He knows a lot of people.

The more concerning thing was that William Nelson-Jones name was indeed signed on this, Tubbo leant forwards, as if that would help him see anything even slightly better. It didn't. But he was still seeing the same thing, a photo of what looked like an old cheque.

It was about ten years ago too. Tubbo ran through any important events from ten years ago. He would've literally been seven years old— when he was seven he was learning how to stab people and cry on command.

The cheque is... sent... signed? To someone named Eret.

Eret...

Tubbo tries to run his brain back to anyone with that name and his brain is... surprisingly empty. He literally can not remember anyone named Eret and he used to be kind of well versed in underground dodgy shit.

Alright... Eret and this guy William Nelson-Jones had some kind of deal going on. Whatever it is doesn't seem that important... and then Tubbo refocuses on the amount of *fucking money* swapped over in that deal and... woah.

Tubbo actually rubs his eyes. Alright— a few million dollars.

He leans forwards, trying to get any more info from this... someone named Eret... surely someone he knows knows someone called Eret— statistically that's just how it's going to roll. Maybe Tommy? Tommy knows a weird amount of people.

Tubbo taps his hand against the desk.

He looks up again, Fred is still cold out— which is weird because that wasn't supposed to last that long.

Glancing at the download time— still a couple of minutes, Tubbo knows that he has enough time to do this and... nothing better to do.

He shuffles up onto his feet with nothing but confusion as he walks towards Fred. He's still laying on his stomach, hands tied behind his back.

Tubbo prods him with his foot.

Fred— *really who calls themselves Fred* ? He prods Fred in the side again and gets very minimal movement.

It's not that Tubbo thinks he's killed this guy, it's that he doesn't... not think that.

“Oi,” Tubbo says, “you alive? Don't be dead that's really fucking inconvenient.”

Nothing.

Tubbo crouches down, checking to see if Fred's breathing, to see if his back is rising and falling even a little bit. If he's tied up a dead guy that's not a good look for him— neither is killing someone.

“Oi,” Tubbo says again.

Instead of getting a groan, or a quiet noise, Tubbo instead gets lunged at with surprising strength.

He smacks into the carpeted floor with a thump, his head knocking against the ground and for a moment his vision is blurry and confusing. He blinks back into focus and Fred is kicking him in the side.

“You bastard!” Tubbo snaps.

Then he's also swinging, clocking this motherfucker across the face who lands flat on his ass. Tubbo, still on the ground then spins slightly and kicks Fred in the side who makes a grunt as something cracks.

This forces Fred to roll away from Tubbo's wildly flailing legs.

Then Fred looks up at Tubbo, a smile creeping across his face which otherwise has remained largely neutral. He lifts up some part of the wall, to reveal a large red button.

Tubbo tries to throw his mind back to the plans— nothing. Shit.

Fred slams his hand on the button.

Immediately the room is flooded in red light and Tubbo looks up as alarms start blaring.

Fuck.

“Fuck. Fuck. *Fuck.* ” Tubbo says, like a true intellectual.

He manages to kick Fred square in the face who makes a noise and starts scrambling towards the computer. He trips over his own feet, almost falling flat on his face and managing to hold himself up with the table.

They were still missing files— shit.

Another minute.

Tubbo looks down at the files, then up at the door, then at Fred.

He can stay and ensure they get all the files— he can stay and get all of the evidence on this motherfucker... all of this info which they can then use. It might be the last info they need to get Nelson-Jones into jail.

He looks at Fred still holding the side of his face.

The flashing lights and the blaring alarms.

The computer is still transferring files over— about 80% completed.

He can stay... and risk getting arrested way more.

It ticks up to 81%.

“Fuck this,” Tubbo mutters to himself.

He immediately takes the USB out, (not even ejecting it properly, he’s a terrible comp-sci student.) Looks at Fred, throws the first thing he can find at Fred before he bolts towards the elevator again.

The door slides open and...

Aimsey, Techno and Sam Warren are standing there.

“You have got to be fucking kidding me,” Tubbo says.

Two people who would probably let him slip by and one person who probably wants him dead. Tubbo stares at all three of them for a long moment, before just shaking his head and running across to the opposite side of the room.

After him, he can hear Techno, who’s weirdly fast. Tubbo dives away from an attempted tackle by Techno and he stumbles to the side, he whirls around to look at Aimsey who is standing with both of her hands in front of her.

They look on the verge of tears as they make eye contact.

Then Aimsey shoots out with her power, and Tubbo dives behind Techno, it hits Techno in the back and Techno grunts as he stumbles to the side and Aimsey yells an apology after him. Tubbo reaches for the knife at his side and swings towards Techno.

He knows that he probably shouldn't be fighting Techno and Aimsey. He also knows if he refuses to fight them that looks suspicious and... he likes his freedom more than he likes either of these people.

Techno easily dodges his swing, managing to grab Tubbo by the arm and proceeds to throw him across the room.

Tubbo smacks into the wall which he feels break behind his back a little bit. For a moment Tubbo debates rolling onto his side and dying, something in his ribs do not feel right. He wheezes and watches as another vine of red reaches out towards him.

He manages to throw his shoulder out of the way and Aimsey just looks at him.

They have eye contact for another second.

More people rush the room, Tubbo isn't even sure who they are— probably security guards not heroes.

Tubbo finally reaches for the gun

“You have a gun?” Aimsey screeches.

“You don't?” Tubbo returns. He points the gun squarely at Aimsey, looking at everyone who pauses in the room.

Staring back at him Aimsey shows him nothing but trust, they don't even look that scared, they just stare at Tubbo. They glance at Techno who has frozen completely, and Sam who has

some bullshit Iron-Man like glove also pauses.

A few of the security guards also pause.

This is a situation that Tubbo knows he's not getting out of now. He can't jump out the window, the windows are impossibly strong here anyway, he's not getting back to the elevator and the whole tower is probably on lockdown now.

If Ranboo was here it might be a different story.

But Ranboo's not here, so it's not a different story.

And if Tubbo and Aimsey aren't careful right now it will end with both of them being arrested. Right now they don't know Aimsey and Tubbo have any connection— and they won't. The only issue would be this tying back to Tommy or Ranboo.

But Tommy is with Ranboo, and Tommy, bless him, believes people a bit too easily. Also Techno, Phil and Wilbur combined won't let anything happen to Tommy. They can probably also get Ranboo out of most things... if they have a good enough cover story as to *why* Ranboo is here.

Fuck.

Tubbo still has the USB in one hand, the gun in the other. The side of his mostly free hand is out of view of everyone but Aimsey, due to Tubbo being so close to the wall. He doesn't *know* if Aimsey knows sign language.

It's his only hope though.

He glances down at his hand, and Aimsey's eyes follow.

He tucks the USB between his fingers, and slowly with one hand begins to spell out 'T-A-C-K-L-E'. He keeps his eyes on Aimsey's the entire time, Aimsey looking at his hand slowly signing. Xe clearly doesn't know much sign language because Tubbo can see the gears whirring in their head, but they get it.

They meet eyes again.

"Alright," Tubbo says, keeping his voice surprisingly even. "You're all gonna let me go and then I'm not gonna shoot anyone. That sounds good, yeah?"

Then Aimsey jumps forwards, catching Tubbo and slamming both of them into the ground. Aimsey then grabs the gun, and then pulls the trigger multiple times so shots go slamming into the wall behind them.

Which Tubbo is almost *sure* is just for dramatic effect.

He manages to stop himself from laughing right as Aimsey punches him in the face.

It fucking hurts too.

Tubbo, shrieking, lets go of the gun to hold the side of his face.

Aimsey takes that chance to roll Tubbo onto his stomach, putting one hand on the back of his head and pressing. It's not comfortable in the slightest, but Tubbo is also mildly proud of how good at fighting Aimsey has got.

"Sorry," Aimsey hisses.

"It's fine," Tubbo hisses, face pressed to the ground, "get the USB back."

With the limited movement he had, he manages to uncurl his hand which was holding the USB in it. Aimsey's hand hovered over his and Tubbo pushes the USB into their hand. Aimsey's hand immediately closes around it and Aimsey pushes Tubbo's face into the floor.

"We're good," Aimsey says, their voice is shaky as they say it. "Now what?"

It's quiet for a few long moments, and Tubbo opens his mouth to say something witty and annoying, but Aimsey seems to sense it and just puts more pressure on the back of Tubbo's head.

"We put him away," Sam says, "put him through the judicial system."

Tubbo just stares at Techno's feet.

This isn't good.

He knows this, he knows that there is solid evidence he snuck into the office of arguably one of the most powerful people in L'Manberg, and he was caught... and it's not going to go well for him. See he *knows* all of that.

All he has that can even slightly save him is Schlatt and all of his vaguely dodgy connections that may or may not get him out of this— or whatever Anemoi (mainly Aimsey realistically) can pull off effectively.

"Will there— be one?" Aimsey asks.

"Of course there will be," Sam mutters mostly under his breath.

Tubbo, for some wild reason— doubts that.

“I demand the right for legal representation— that’s the sixth amendment, I’m invoking my right to the sixth amendment.”

“You’re not American,” Techno says.

Still, Tubbo knows under normal rules here he has the right to legal representation, and Schlatt is rich as hell. And still, Tubbo doesn’t think that is going to be even remotely enough for what he’s about to go through.

Two of the security step forward. Aimsey stands, taking a few steps backwards, almost tripping over his own feet. Techno catches them around the shoulders and gives them a half-side-hug, which would be cute if Tubbo wasn’t about to get arrested.

For the sake of it Tubbo tries to put up a fight, he manages a few thrashes, he headbutts one of the guards and manages to run towards the elevator. Just as Sam Warren grabs him, picking him up without any trouble.

Tubbo kicks his feet for good measure, managing to kick Sam in the leg, but Sam is more resistant to kicking than Tubbo thinks.

Then Tubbo drops all of his weight, Sam clearly isn’t expecting because he lands on the floor.

Sadly, two security guards pick him up, bending his arm back behind his back in a way that is not comfortable and has Tubbo gritting his teeth and accepting whatever fate is about to happen.

Sam walks closer to him, smiling slightly. Techno and Aimsey both can’t see Sam, just his back and that also makes Tubbo mildly terrified. Sam tilts his head to the side a little and just grins at Tubbo.

“I hope you’ll be able to see Tommy when you get out,” Sam whispers, “I know you two are friends.”

And Tubbo’s blood goes ice cold. It’s a threat, he knows it’s a threat. He doesn’t know *how* it’s a threat but there’s something in the way Sam says it that gets Tubbo’s shoulders to hike up near his ears.

Shit.

Maybe Ranboo did make the right call.

Tubbo just looks at Sam, trying to see anything behind his eyes— get anything behind Sam’s intentions.

Before he can, the security guards launch him backwards, as Tubbo starts getting dragged away.

Tubbo let himself go a little bit limp, if he was going to be dragged away, then Tubbo refuses to walk the entire thing.

He gives Aimsey one last look, and she’s standing there, hand curled into a fist around the USB. Then he lets himself get dragged away...

And he tries not to be too scared about what this means for him.

The uncontrollable roar of blood in his ears as his stomach drops tells him otherwise.

Shit.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter Summary:

- Tubbo freaks out about this entire plan to sneak into the tower and get information from William Nelson. Aimsey is like “bro you’ll be fine” (he is not fine.)
- They sneak in. Get distracted because Tommy is fucking around and Sam is being threatening as fuck, Ranboo is like “RED FLAG ALERT” so abandons the mission to make sure Tommy doesn’t get fucking murdered by Samuel.
- Tubbo goes on with the mission, it’s like fine.
- Meanwhile, Ranboo and Aimsey both are like “WOW WHO IS THIS I HAVE NO IDEA WHO THIS PERSON IS” and because tommy is stupid /aff he does not see what is going on even slightly and just goes “alright ranboo we gotta sign you in” when they go to Kristin to do that. TURNS OUT THERE’S A BREAK IN ON WILLIAM NELSON-JONES’S FLOOR
- Tubbo’s life is going bad. He fights some dude named Fred. It goes okay. He gets some info on a TRUSTY USB. Then it goes worst because Fred presses an alarm button. It ends with Tubbo managing to get Aimsey the info with all the blackmail on it. BUT HE GETS ARRESTED. OH NO. I SURE HOPE THIS DOESN’T HAVE ANY CONSEQUENCES EVER NOT ONE TIME.

Hey all, huge reminder that Palestine is still under attack and experiencing a genocide right now and being able to ignore it is a massive privilege.

If you’re unsure to WHAT is happening in Palestine at the moment there are so many resources such as this [Al Jazeera](#) article and [this run down](#) by US Campaign for Palestinian Rights and [Palestine 101](#) by Decolonise Palestine (that entire website is very educational)

Ways you can practically assist include the [daily click](#), this is a way for anyone to raise money for Palestine even if you have no disposable income. If you do, donate to organisations such as [Care For Gaza](#) or just even get educated on the topic. [ceasefiretoday.com](#) is a very effective resource that gives multiple options to contact politicians, sign petitions and effect change in multiple countries.

Doing any of those things is going to be quicker than the time you have dedicated to TINAAOS up until this point and make a far more visible and important impact.

We're So Back! (TINAAOS ANNOUNCEMENT)

I'll start with the TLDR: TINAAOS is being continued in a separate fic, it's still the same story just a different fic. It'll be the next one in this series and is going to be uploaded in about 24 hours from now (at the time of publishing it is about 11pm AEDT on the 2/12/2024.)

Meaning at 11pm aedt 3/12/24 the [contuiniation will be uploaded!!!](#)

Now if that's all you're here for. GREAT

The long and short of it is (not too sound too fucking full of myself) the idea of TINAAOS very much intimidates me, especially with half a million words attached to that fic. Characters so deeply interwoven into the story I don't know how to write them out and writing from when I was 15 (I AM NINETEEN NOW. I AM ABOUT TO BE IN MY SECOND YEAR OF UNIVERSITY.)

Due to this I figured this was the next best way forward, keeping the story and ideas I do like of TINAAOS while also creating something new, funky and cool, that is going to be both a tighter story and finish up some of these story arcs.

A lot of characters have been completely removed and written out. I'll give you a list: Wilbur, literally all of Dream Team (duh), Punz, Eret and other characters who were based on creators that I no longer want to have associated with my writing and my most precious work. I have reworked plot lines and even previous lore (most of which had not been revealed yet) to create a result I am genuinely happier with. Some of these characters that have otherwise been written out will be mentioned, (the biggest example is Wilbur will be mentioned a few times due to how intertwined his character backstory was with the persecution of vigilantes.)

EITHER WAY, I'll see you soon in 'I'll Let Atlas Fall', which is my beloved continuation of 'This is Not an Act of Spite'. Thanks for sticking with me and this story, and I hope you enjoy the slightly more political, darker version of TINAAOS I've wanted to tell.

<3

STOP UPLOADING MY WORK ONTO OTHER WEBSITES I AM NOT OKAY WITH IT

[Spotify Playlist](#) (featuring some foreshadowing)

[Every TINAAOS chapter summary \(sorted by both act AND chapter\)!](#)

[the main TINAAOS tiktok tag!](#) If you make a TikTok about TINAAOS tag it with that and I will 100% see it.

also. here's the [discord link!](#) i am more active there and also when social media gets taken down in australia (long fucking story. google it.) it's the easiest way to see updates.

Works inspired by this one

[Crash and Burn {Please Don't Die}](#). by [GrandmaRar](#)

[Restricted Work] by [pigwidgeontheowlertoat](#)

[Theseus could take the fall](#) by [weirdstories123](#)

[Tommys found family](#). by [BloominginaRottenRibcage](#)

[HENRY](#) by [TheRatKingListens](#)

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[Come Home Theseus, We Need You.](#) by [Loochdog05](#), [Wink_Star](#)

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[That Time when Tommy went to a Festival.](#) by [keisuromi](#)

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